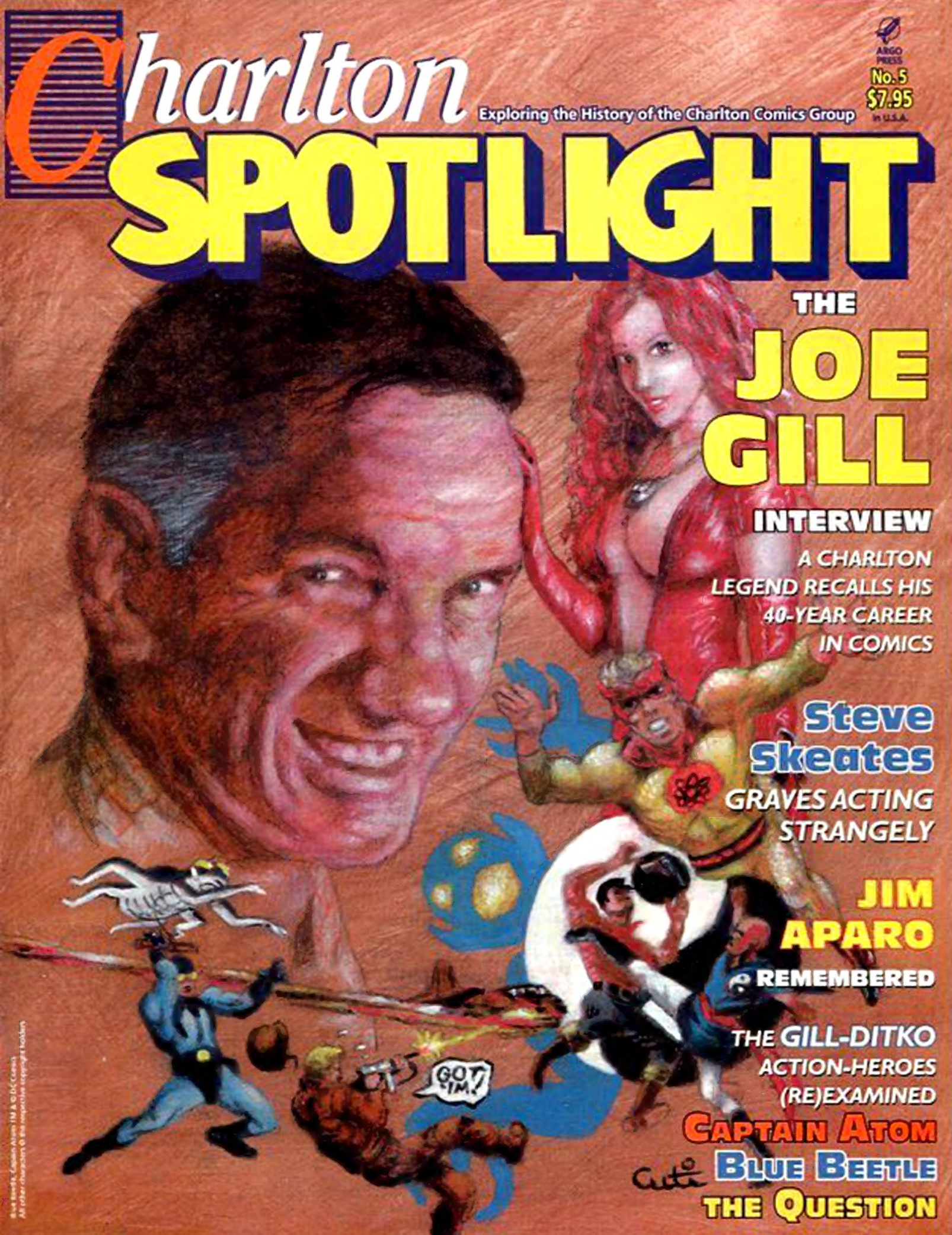
Charlton
Exploring the History of the Charlton Comics Group
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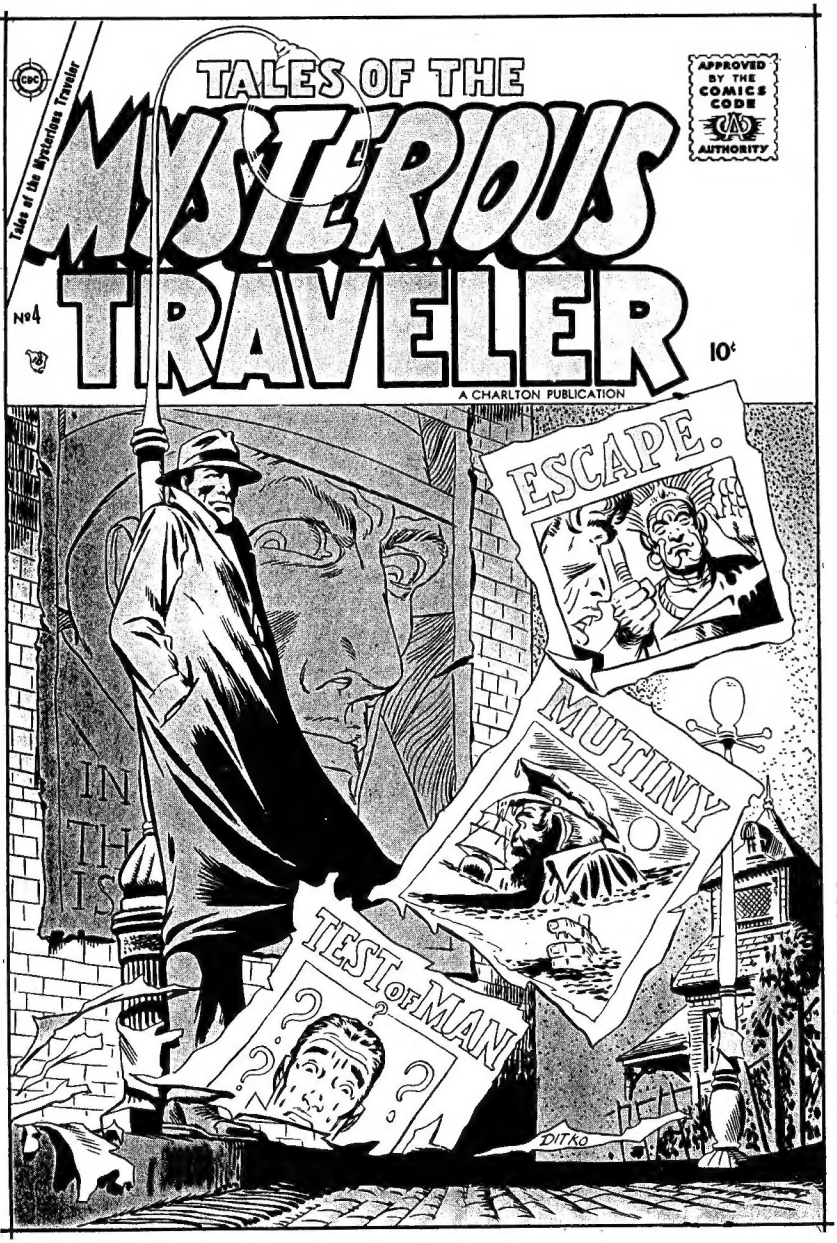
SPOTLIGHT
THE JOE GILL INTERVIEW
A CHARLTON LEGEND RECALLS HIS 40-YEAR CAREER IN COMICS
Steve Skeates
GRAVES ACTING STRANGELY
JIM APARO
REMEMBERED
THE GILL-DITKO ACTION-HEROES (RE)EXAMINED
CAPTAIN ATOM
BLUE BEETLE
THE QUESTION
GOT 'IM!



One of the most memorab comics of the 1950s was **Joe Gill** and **Steve Ditko's** ***Tales of the Mysterious Traveler.*** This cover to issue #4, Aug. 1957, is from a photocopy of the original art courtesy of Tom Christopher. The Mysterious Traveler © 200 the respective copyright hold

Charlton SPOTLIGHT

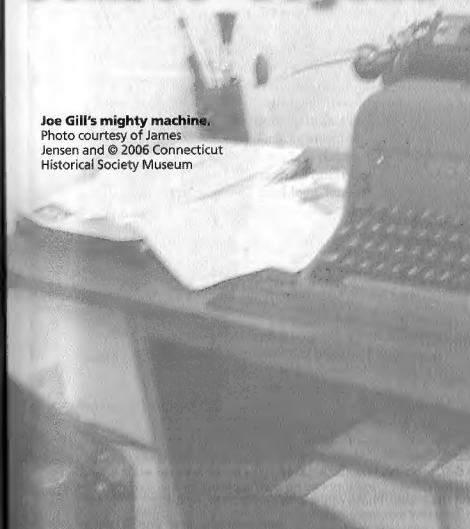
No. 5 • FALL 2006

Exploring the History of the Charlton Comics Group

FRONT COVER
Joe Gill *with some of his creations by* **Nicola Cuti**

BACK COVER
Mysteries of Unexplored Worlds *#4, July 1957, a Charlton classic by* **Steve Ditko**

comics legend JOE GILL speaks



Joe Gill's mighty machine.
Photo courtesy of James Jensen and © 2006 Connecticut Historical Society Museum

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THE Joe Gill INTERVIEW

conducted by Jim Amash

transcribed by Jon B. Knutson
amplified by Brian K. Morris

[It's the artists who usually get the most attention in the history of 20th-century comic book publishing. That's only natural; comics are nothing if not a visual medium, and we justly celebrate the great illustrators of our favorite pulp pages. But in comics, art has to start with story—and too often we overlook the writers.

***Joe Gill** is one of the field's pioneers, starting his career in comics after he came home from the Big One, in 1945. He was Charlton's chief writer from the mid-1950s on. Pick up a round dozen Charlton products—comics or popular magazines—from any year. Chances are Joe wrote the entirety of better than three-quarters of them. He could, and did, write anything and everything: comic books, magazine packages, short stories, novels, textbooks, educational and promotional material, technical manuals, history, college dissertations to order. By any measure, Joe Gill is one of the most prolific writers of the last half-century. But it is primarily his work for Charlton Comics that we celebrate here.*

It's our habit at Charlton Spotlight *to compile a checklist of published comics work for every creator we throw the spotlight on. But no complete checklist of Joe Gill's comics writing is or ever will be possible. Joe himself kept no records of his work, and virtually no production records survive from Charlton's 50-year turn around the track. In 1992, comics historian Robin Snyder estimated that Joe had written at least 52,800 pages of Charlton comics, a total that can only be largely inferential and which is, if anything, conservative. Charlton didn't get around to listing creator credits until the mid-1960s, and even then only sporadically.*

Note: *As this issue was going to press we learned of the passing of Mickey Spillane on July 17, 2006. We extend our condolences to the Spillane family and to Joe, who has lost his oldest and best friend.*

Join us now as ace comics historian Jim Amash sits down with Joe to talk with him about his time on planet Earth.

—Michael Ambrose]

Mighty Joe Gill, probably late 1950s, taken "by a secret admirer while pounding away at a Charlton classic." Joe supplied his own captions for many of the photos accompanying this article. Photo courtesy of and © 2006 Joe Gill.

BEGINNINGS: TIMELY & FUNNIES, INC.

JIM AMASH: Joe, I'd like to start with a very basic question. When and where were you born?

JOE GILL: In Scranton, Pennsylvania, July 13th, 1919.

Jim: What got you interested in writing?

Joe: This is going to sound rather roundabout, but I was a radio operator aboard ship in World War II. I used to use a typewriter in order to transcribe what I heard, in Morse code. So I was a good typist, and in addition to that, my brother Ray had been an editor and a writer of Archie comics. He had been in comics since about 1938. When I got out of the service, he was no longer an editor; he was writing for Archie comics. A friend of mine from before the war, Mickey Spillane, and Ray were open-

ing a studio for themselves to work—they were just getting set up—but they were at this store the week that I was discharged from the service, November 1945. So I was waiting a week, I was going to reenlist in the Navy as a chief radio operator, and to fill in the time, I spent it with them, repainting the office. It had been a bakery before. Repainting it, and buying used desks and chairs to furnish the office, you know. After three or four days, it was finished. We looked at the finished place, and I said, "Wait a minute, what's that thing?" They said, "That's your desk. You're going to write comics." [*laughter*] I had never even dreamed of writing comics.

Jim: Who told you you were going to write?

Joe: Both of them. Spillane and my brother had been talking about it, because I used to write funny letters in the service, and they'd put my letters up on the bulletin board, so apparently I had a following before I ever got out! [*laughter*] The first assignment I had—my brother had the assignment—and he gave it to me; it was for Edison Bell. My brother drew an illustration, a breakdown of how to build the downhill racers for kids, soapbox cars. You know, how to use the soapbox car. That was the first one I did, and they just bought it. I don't think I had a rejection for six months, if ever! It was for Funnies, Inc., headed by Lloyd Jacquet. He was packaging complete comics for various publishers, including Martin Goodman's Timely Comics [*now known as Marvel Comics*]. I wrote for Lloyd Jacquet, but Timely published the stories.

Jim: Who drew your first story?

Joe: I don't know. [***Ed. note:*** *probably Henry C. Kiefer, for* Blue Bolt Comics, *Novelty Press (per the GCD)*]

Jim: At Timely, you also wrote Captain America and the Human Torch as well as crime and western comics.

Joe: Oh, yeah! As a matter of fact, Stan Lee said I was the best western writer he had.

Jim: Were you still at the studio you had with your brother and Spillane when you worked for them?

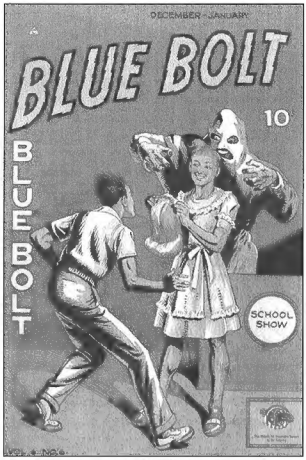
Joe: Yes, because Mickey was mainly employed by Timely. By that time, we were working directly for Timely, and not for Lloyd Jacquet.

"Best friends, Joe Gill and Mickey Spillane back in 1941. Dig that head of wavy hair. Those fangs are my own, too." Photo courtesy of and © 2006 Joe Gill.

Jim: Who hired you at Timely?

Joe: Stan Lee. But I also dealt with Noah Sahlett. He was an assistant editor, and he occasionally needed two-page fillers. The comics at that time carried two text pages for filler. It was a governmental requirement for mailing privileges.

One time, Noah said he needed a lot of short stories in a hurry. So he paid $10 a page. I needed a drink in a hurry, okay? [*mutual laughter*] I got together ten carbon copies of stories I'd previously sold, and brought them over, and gave him all of them, and he gave me a check for $100. So he called me in about a week, he said, "I don't mind buying copies, but not for stories I've already run!" [*more laughter*] He was a very nice, sympathetic guy.



Blue Bolt Comics v6, #5 [#62], Jan. 1946. We don't know if this issue features one of Joe's "Edison Bell" stories, but it's a likely candidate. Image from the Grand Comic-Book Database; Blue Bolt © 2006 the respective copyright holder.

Jim: When you wrote Captain America or the Human Torch, did you have to submit a plot first?

Joe: I think that varied with the writer. Anytime I wrote for DC, I never submitted a plot. And I never went in and had a long conversation with the editors. Murray Boltinoff would give me a couple of romances, so I had to go sit at his desk like a horse's ass, and discuss the plot and the motivation for a seven-page romance! What the hell? It was ridiculous! That was one reason I liked working at Charlton. As a matter of practice, I avoided writing for superheroes, I think I only wrote one Captain America, and I don't know if I ever got a check for any Human Torch. My brother used to write the Human Torch before World War II, and Sub-Mariner was a bad guy in the Human Torch stories. He became a hero later.

Jim: Did you ever write Sub-Mariner?

Joe: No. At the time, I didn't have to write superheroes because they didn't capture the entire market the way they did later. But I went in, and I'd think, what did I feel like doing? I wouldn't write any love stories—I tell you, that was for girls to write. I wound up later writing a ton of them. But at the time, I was mainly doing westerns for Timely. And there were plenty of westerns to do.

Jim: Were there any other editors besides Noah and Stan Lee that you worked for at Timely?

Joe: Dorothy Roubicek, who later became Dorothy Woolfolk. She was a wonderful woman. Very forthright, and a lot of fun. She had a good sense of humor. And she wasn't picky. She'd just say, "I need a six-pager, eight-page romance," and I'd give it to her.

Jim: Romance or western?

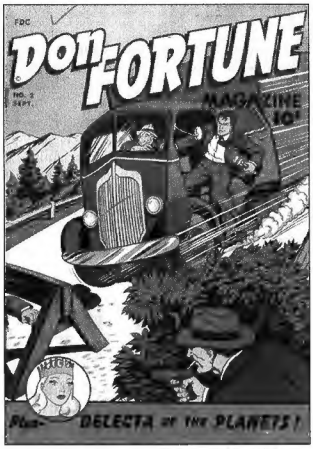
Joe: She wasn't doing westerns. [***Ed. note:*** *according to a few former Timely staffers, Dorothy edited adventure comics—Jim.*] I think I was mainly doing westerns, but I knew Dottie from Timely. It was when she went with DC later, we were old friends.

Jim: How long did you work for Timely in the 1940s?

Joe: I only worked for them in 1946, because Timely crapped out in 1946. [***Ed. note:*** *they cut back on their production of titles.*] Spillane ran out of work; he had to write novels to get a start on his own house.

Jim: Do you remember what westerns you wrote later for Timely?

Joe: Kid Colt, Two-Gun Kid, Apache Kid . . . None of us were getting bylines. I never got a byline. At Charlton, I didn't care about it, but then, later on, they started giving bylines. They said they had to give bylines to the writers, too. And I'd just as soon not be identified with a lot of those books! [*laughter*]



Don Fortune Magazine #2, Sept. 1946, with Joe's "Wet Track Trouble," a four-page sports text story. Image from the Grand Comic-Book Database; Don Fortune © 2006 the respective copyright holder.

Jim: When you and Ray and Spillane started the studio, were you going to do your own comic books, or were you just going to work for other publishers?

Joe: They were just going to work for other publishers. But Spillane and I each wanted to publish our own comics. So he wrote a comic book that was a forerunner of his *Mike Hammer* series, called *Mike Danger.* Mine was, I think, what I first called *The Drifter.* I actually had the artwork done, but we never had a publisher.

Jim: There were three artists who were involved in *Mike Danger,* and I want to see if you remember any of them. One of them was Harry Sahle.

Joe: I don't remember him.

Jim: Do you remember Mike Roy?

Joe: Yeah. He used to have a white Cadillac. He used to do the artwork for *The Saint* newspaper strip, and he had a cartoon of the Saint on the side door of his Cadillac convertible. He was a nice guy, with a great sense of humor. He was a good friend of my brother's, too.

You know, the trouble with this is, I was never a comic buff. I never had any interest in the comics, aside from when my brother was an editor, before the war. Once the Human Torch was fighting the Sub-Mariner, and Sub-Mariner succeeded in imprisoning the Human Torch in a vacuum, dropped on the bottom of the ocean. My brother wanted to know how to get him out! [*laughter*] He couldn't think of a way to get him out. I thought of a solution, but I don't remember now what it was!

Jim: Did you meet many of the Timely artists of the time, like Carl Burgos or Bill Everett?

Joe: I think I met Bill Everett, but I wasn't mostly involved with comics. I didn't spend a lot of my time with them. I did quite a lot of work for St. John's. A lot of westerns. My editor was Mary McDermott, and she left after I was working there about six months, and our relationship was always good. As a matter of fact, I used to bring in my assignment, and I'd be hung over like you wouldn't believe. [*laughter*] I needed a drink, I didn't have any money. So Mary said, "Okay, I'll read this in the next week or so," and I said, "Could you read one of them right way?" She said, "Why?" I said, "I'm broke!" She did, and brought me back a check for the whole assignment! So the following week, we'd established a precedent, she was paying me the same day I delivered. That was unknown in comics. Then after six or seven months, she left. And there was another editor, Joan Appleton. I brought my assignment to Joan, who had a broken leg in a cast. She was sitting there at the desk—very pretty, a lovely woman—and I gave her my work, and she said, "Okay, I've got them." And I said, "When are you going to read them?" She said, "A week or two." I kept sitting there, and I tell her I needed the money, and she says, "I hate this." And she opens this drawer, and takes out a note from Mary McDermott that read, "Pay Joe Gill when he brings the script." So she bought it, and she paid me right then! And every week, it went like that. And Joan and I became great friends. [*laughter*] And then Joan left, and another guy took over.

Jim: How long was Joan there?

Joe: It wasn't a year, I think. So a third guy came in, and he had a note to buy my work. I have no idea why! [*laughter*] To this day, I don't have any idea why. And about a year and a half later, I called St. John's, and I got a guy named Bill Deutsch, and I said, "You got any assignments?" And he says, "Who is this?" and I say, "Joe Gill." He says, "Joe Gill. You know, I've got a cardboard box in there, and it's full of scripts that you wrote, none of them ever went out to an artist." I said, "Why?" He said, "I don't know what the hell they were buying them for!" And I never found out to this day. I think I must've been a charming guy.

Jim: What was it like to work for Funnies, Inc.?

Joe: I worked for Funnies, Inc. a lot. As a matter of fact, Grace Jacquet—you might get this—I'd be staying home—I was an alcoholic—and I'd be sitting at home in the morning, wondering what the hell to do. Should I go out and look for a house today or something? And I'd get a phone call from Grace Jacquet. "Joe," she'd say, "I need a western. I've got to have a story for a western comic book this afternoon." As a matter of fact, it was for Charlton, but I didn't know that then. She was paying me $5 a page, which was less than DC was paying, or Timely, but as

soon as I handed in a script, she gave me a check. Which was a big factor. So she'd call me up in the morning, and say, "Can you get over here by noon?" I'd say, "Yeah." And I get over there, and she said what she wanted, which usually was a western, and all she'd have would be the material for a movie that was already made: *Sunset Carson*. And I'd have to write a comic book based on that, the content of that movie, but they didn't provide enough information. She had a penciler already there, one guy doing roughs, and another guy doing the pencils in the next office, and I'd give it to them page by page as I finished it, and at 4:30, she said, "You're going to be finished today?" I said, "Yeah." I wrote about 40 pages that afternoon.

Jim: You wrote 40 pages in an afternoon?

Joe: Sure did. Hey, I was writing 125 pages a week for Charlton, at the same time I was doing work for King Features. I did comics through the spring of 1946, and then I ran out of assignments. I couldn't be bothered going around from building to building asking for assignments, and bullshit and all. I went in the merchant marine. I must've worked for Funnies, Inc., off and on, about five or six years.

Jim: Did you deal with Lloyd Jacquet, or did you deal with Grace?

Joe: I dealt with Grace. She was the efficient member of that family. Lloyd Jacquet just sat around and basked in his former glory as a commander in the Navy. Grace Jacquet was a slender woman, she didn't have good health. She died some time in the '50s, I think. She was very, very agreeable. She was very practical, and I was of great value to her, because I could turn out a story on order.

Charlton's ***Cowboy Western Comics*** #27, Apr. 1950. Sunset Carson TM & © 2006 the respective copyright holder.

Jim: Jim Fitzsimmons worked for Lloyd Jacquet as a production manager.

Joe: Jim Fitzsimmons worked for Jacquet before World War II. He was in his 30s, a little older than me. Big guy. I didn't have much to do with him. He and my brother were on the staff then. Jacquet wouldn't risk his own money in publishing comics, but he packaged comics for Goodman in the beginning. He packaged comics for anybody who wanted to publish a comic, so he had a lot of artists coming or going. My brother wrote quite a bit for Jacquet. Grace was the only one I ever did any business with, as far as scripts were concerned. Lloyd Jacquet really didn't have much to do with the content. I think he specialized in lunches. [*mutual laughter*] Maybe he got the artists to do comics, but Grace did the drudgery.

Jim: As far as I know, your brother was never interviewed about his comic book career.

Joe: No. He was Archie's first regular writer, and he had a difference of opinion—he wanted a byline, and editor Harry Shorten wouldn't give it to him, so then Ray went on strike. He was getting $10 a page, and he demanded $15 a page because Archie was so successful, and my brother thought it was because of his writing. So Shorten told him to take a walk! In the meantime, my brother had brought in a guy named Frank Doyle, who was later the main writer for Archie Comics for many years.

I grew up with Frank Doyle. He was a good golfer, he had a wonderful sense of humor, a punster. Frank Doyle did a good job on Archie. My brother left there, and he wound up as a senior editor at Fawcett magazines. He was editing and packaging, really, but he had me write stories about racing cars, how to build a log house, or whatever assignment they gave me to put together, for the magazines.

My brother had a great sense of humor, too. He never went for sports or anything, it was always art. He did excellent watercolors and oils. He also did junk sculpture. He wrote plays and musicals for amateur theatricals in Long Island and they thought the world of him. He was a writer, he never did any illustration, but he cartooned his scripts, which was a practice early on in the comics. You'd draw a rough stick-figure outline to indicate the action, and pencil in the balloons.

Jim: Did either you or Mickey Spillane write that way?

Joe: Oh, I couldn't draw a line! [*laughter*] Spillane typed his stories. Spillane used to write a synopsis, and then he'd write a breakdown, panel one and so and so, a rough outline, and then he'd type it, and then he'd retype it. And all that time, while he was writing a synopsis, I'd finish a story. I was ten times as fast as he was.

Jim: Ray was a very prolific writer.

Joe: Yeah, he was a very creative writer. He originated characters. My brother's interest was primarily in cartooning, and he would submit cartoons to the *New York Journal* and get published. He got bitten with the bug early. He was in a Catho-

lic fraternity, and one of the guys in the fraternity—it might've been Jim Fitzsimmons—said to apply for a job at Funnies, and he got hired. Ray was multitalented, but he diluted his time so much between all his talents. Mainly, he was a very good editor; a senior editor at Fawcett. He wasn't being paid a hell of a lot, so he was working for a competing publisher, which was a no-no, and [*laughs*] he was selling similar stuff. At the time, I think it was late '50s, early '60s, there was a women's organization that they were organizing—it was national, wanting equality for women in all areas, and my brother's secretary was a member of that organization. My brother said someone expected something in the mail, and he said, "My secretary forgot to mail it." And she was furious, and demanded an apology. He didn't take it seriously. And he was called in by this executive, who was frightened of the women's lib thing, and he apologized to the woman in front of the executive, and the woman refused his apology. And then he was let go! That wrecked him, and he was probably in his late 40s then.

Jim: When was Ray born?

Joe: 1918. He passed away about 1990.

THE AMAZING ADVENTURES OF GILL & SPILLANE

Jim: We have a certain image of Mickey Spillane today, as you know. But what was he like back in the '40s?

Joe: He liked girls, and he liked drinking beer, and we did a lot of both. He was a lifeguard. We worked in Gimbel's basement as Christmas help, and we got to be great friends, and we drank beer, and liked girls. He said, "You're going to be a lifeguard this summer with me." I didn't have anything else to do. I was working wherever I was at, so he said, "Can you swim?" and I said, "Yeah, but I'm not a lifeguard." He said, "That's all right," he was a Red Cross instructor. So he gave me a card, like a license issued by the Red Cross, and he signed it, and I was a qualified lifeguard! [*laughter*] The two of us went down in June 1941 to Breezy Point, that's Queens, to see the head guy, and he stood on the beach—and this was June, it was cold!—and he said, "Show us what you do." So Mickey said, "Okay, I'll go in, and swim out, and Joe will come out and rescue me." That was the qualifications. [*laughter*] He dove in, it was a rough day, he dove in, and swam out—jeez, he swam out too far! I barely made it out to him, let alone rescued him! [*laughter*] So, he's getting me in a cross-chest carry. I didn't know what a cross-chest carry was! He told me to put my arm around him, and side-stroke in, and he saved both our lives! [*laughter*] I could barely walk getting out of the water! But they hired me as a lifeguard! [*laughter*]

Jim: Would you say that Mickey Spillane then was much like the Mickey Spillane of today?

Joe: He hasn't changed a bit. We used to go skiing together in Prospect Park.

Jim: And didn't you play cards with him?

Joe: No, he's no card player. He didn't gamble.

Jim: I have two stories about you and Mickey Spillane I'd like to ask you about. One of them was a time you guys heard this communist talking in the park, and he was waving the hammer and sickle, the flag.

Joe: Spillane and I were together, there was a corner in Flatbush Avenue and East 13th Street, where these communists would give speeches. I think they had a crowd of maybe 100 people, he'd be up on a box or a platform, making a speech. It didn't excite me in any way. Mickey blasted the speaker to a certain extent. He liked to tell a story that he was going to throw a garbage can off the roof of a building, but he never did.

Jim: The story he told was that you guys got a hold of this guy, and you sat on him and stuffed the communist flag in his mouth!

Joe: Wow. You ever told that story to Spillane?

Jim: Spillane told that story.

Joe: Well, that's not true! No. Good God.

Jim: For a while, you guys were living in a tent in a hayfield outside of Newburgh, New York.

"Summer of 1941, Joe Gill, lifeguard, with catamaran. Captain Spillane is hiding till I carry it down to the water." Photo courtesy of and © 2006 Joe Gill.

Joe: Yeah. Spillane wrote *I, The Jury,* and he bought a six-acre plot of land outside of Newburgh for $900; he and George Wilson—George Wilson is in his 80s now, in upstate New York, selling oil paintings. He's pretty successful. But anyway, he and George were building a house on their own. They didn't have any money for backhoes; everything was pick and shovel, and they built a cinder block house, 30 feet by 40 feet. It was a lot of work, and they weren't able to do it all at once, because they didn't have the money. They built the house, and they put on the roof, but they didn't have any money for windows. [*laughter*] The first winter they were there, they had a big fireplace, and there were a lot of oak trees outside, so they burned wood in the fireplace. They

had cots right in front of the fireplace. I would visit from time to time. And it was *cold*. Whew!

Jim: Why were you living in a tent with him?

Joe: Because the house wasn't built yet. They were camped beside the site where they were building the house. They lived on fried potatoes and onions. [*laughter*] Honest to God. The raccoons would be coming in at night, trying to steal the food.

Jim: How long did you stay there in the tent with them?

Joe: I was working in the city. I was in the merchant marines, and my ship would come into port, and I'd spend three or four days there.

"Late fall 1993. The crew of APA 37, the *Cavalier,* assault transport, have reunion. Torpedoed, unsunk, decorated in WW II." Photo courtesy of and © 2006 Joe Gill.

Jim: Spillane was quite a character.

Joe: Oh, yeah. A very clever, likeable man. He had strong opinions.

Jim: Was Mickey politically active at all?

Joe: Oh, no. And today, well, Spillane is still a devout Jehovah's Witness. Mickey and I, we were almost adults in the latter half of the Depression, and along with everybody else, we didn't have much. We didn't have a lot of money to spend on girls, and when we'd have a party, we'd dig up four bucks for a quarter-keg of beer. But then, Spillane began to have loot, and around 1950, the money from his first books now began to be substantial, so he liked a good time. He met two middle-aged women who were Jehovah's Witnesses, and they converted him. There goes all the good times. As a matter of fact, it affected his writing. His original book, that marked his literary character, was bawdy and lusty and he went for things like you'd see a woman on the subway, and he'd say "beneath all those clothes, she's stark naked." He used strong language. But then, he started saying "darn" instead of "damn," and "gosh," and you know. He was trying to please Jehovah's Witnesses as well as his reading public. It kind of hampered him.

Jim: How old were you when you met him?

Joe: Twenty-one.

Jim: Did you meet him through Ray?

Joe: No, he and I were applying for a job at Gimbel's basement, Christmas help, and the guy was giving us the inspiring hiring speech. There was a group of us sitting on chairs and I happened to sit next to Spillane. The guy was saying, "It's impossible to steal from Gimbel's. We have you watched every minute of the day. We know you'll steal if you can." Totally stupid speech to make. And the fella sitting next to me says, "That's horseshit. You could steal 'em blind if you want." [*laughter*] But he and I made our expenses.

Jim: How did Spillane get into writing comic books?

Joe: My brother hired him. Ray was an editor at Funnies, Inc., and Spillane and I were in and out of each other's houses, and after I went in the service in September 1941—

Jim: So you went in before Pearl Harbor?

Joe: Oh yeah, I joined the Coast Guard, as a matter of fact, because that was a great outfit and it still is a great outfit. I spent the first year on a Coast Guard ship in the North Atlantic and then we rotated. It was hazardous duty. Then I got assigned to a Navy flagship, an ATA, attack transport. I was attached to a Navy flag as a communications chief.

After I went in, in that fall of 1941, Spillane and my brother were friends, and my brother hired him. Mickey did have some vague idea about writing. He went to Kansas State College, or maybe it was University of Kansas or Kansas State, whichever was cheapest. He hadn't done any writing before he went to work for Funnies. He began working, I think he got a dollar a page for writing comics, and he got fifty cents for writing two-page filler. While he was in the Air Force, he was down in Mississippi. His wife was from Greenwood, Mississippi; that's where he was stationed. Anytime he could get off and come to New York, well, you could sell used toilet paper to the comic book publishers, because they were desperate for scripts. So Spillane, quite often, would fly up here, it was termed cross-country training, and it was encouraged, so he'd make a flight in an AT-6, maybe, from Mississippi to New York, with stops along the way, maybe, and write a hundred pages of comics for Arnold, and get ten bucks a page, have the weekend with his girlfriend, and then fly back to Mississippi.

Jim: When you said Arnold, do you mean Everett "Busy" Arnold at Quality Comics?

Joe: Yes. Spillane was already established at Timely when I got out in November 1945, and my brother was mostly doing Archie and working for Funnies, Inc.

Jim: You wrote a few of the *Mike Hammer* newspaper strips.

Joe: I think only two or three, and Spillane was highly critical of anything I did. I didn't want to work with him. I wanted to be friends with him. I think the last strip that Spillane sold to the

Pathfinder news magazine of Mar. 5, 1952, ran a feature on the phenomenal success of Mickey Spillane's Mike Hammer novels. The original caption to this photo states that Spillane used Joe as a model for the tough private eye. We can believe it. Photo © 2006 the respective copyright holder.

syndicate, he had a nearly naked woman tied on a bed, and they were going to torture her. And he was told not to, but he went ahead and did it. That was the end of *Mike Hammer.*

Jim: How critical was he of your writing?

Joe: I don't know. When Mickey was writing *I, The Jury,* his position in the studio was to my left. He typed it on yellow office paper, to be retyped, and I'd read a page, and I told him, I said, "This crap will never sell." [*laughter*] He said, "Yes, it will," and he said, "They're going to print it just the way I wrote it." He wouldn't let them change a word, honest to God!

Jim: Did they try to make him change it?

Joe: Yeah! The editor wanted to suggest some changes, and Mickey wouldn't let them. He's a stubborn son of a gun. [*laughter*] Mickey's agent was a friend of my brother's. He was an ink salesman. He used to play racquetball or something with an assistant editor at Dutton. And Dutton came up short on their list of what they were going to publish, they needed a tough cop type of story, so he told my brother, and my brother told him about Mickey's book, so he became Spillane's agent overnight and sold the book to Dutton. He made a ton of money off that little episode in his life.

The first contract Mickey signed with Hollywood, he sold the movie rights to Mike Hammer, and I remember he got $276,000 cash, and the contract read 2% of the gross of all the movies that were made. I don't know how he fared on that deal, it might've been a little creative bookkeeping, which was common in Hollywood, to cut costs.

Jim: What did you think when Mickey decided to play Mike Hammer in a movie?

Joe: Was that the one that was in the circus, *Ring of Fear*? That wasn't a bad movie.

Jim: Did it surprise you?

Joe: He wasn't bad. He made a fortune out of the Miller Beer commercials. He always had the blonde at the end. That was his shtick.

Jim: He looked like he had fun doing those commercials.

Joe: Oh, yeah, he loved it!

Jim: Why did he want you to write the newspaper strip? Was he having deadline trouble?

Joe: That was was the original idea. Mickey was a great guy for saying he's going to make it. I talked to Mickey since we spoke last. I told him about me shoving the communist flag, and I said that was bullshit and I told him I told you that.

Jim: What did he say?

Joe: He says, "Well, that was the first story I ever wrote!" [*laughter*] You can use that.

Jim: I will!

THE ORIGINS OF CHARLTON

Jim: Now, I'm looking through the list of things you've written, and it's a long list, because you wrote for damn near everybody.

Joe: Robin Snyder wrote a thing in one of his newsletters, he said that I was the "King of the Comics." That was just the volume of writing, you should be judged on being king of the comics. The only reason I ever wrote as many stories as I did was because I was working for Charlton for $4 a page originally! There was a flood in 1955, and Charlton's presses were washed out and everything. John Santangelo ran the place, and he was very cheap, and $4 a page was too little to pay in the beginning, but after the flood, he gathered all the employees together and said, "I'm going to publish comics, but I want you to all work for half your rate now, until I get on my feet." So I was getting $2 a page! So that's when I started to really type fast! [*laughter*] There was a competent editor at the time who hired me in 1955: Al Fago, and his wife Blanche ran comics in Charlton, and they recruited artists, and me as a writer. They asked me if I could write 25 pages a week, and I said, "I'll try." [*laughter*] So when they found out I could write 50 pages a week . . .

You have to realize, I could get assignments from DC and St. John, and they paid two and a half times as much or more, and if I went to Stan Lee, I knew I could get work there. I worked for Charlton. Working for Charlton offered more than going around the city begging for assignments here, there, and everywhere. The last ten years I was writing comics, I was making about $40,000, $45,000, and that was pretty good in those days. But when I wrote the stories, I knew they'd be bought, and I knew I'd be paid for them a week later, and you can't beat that. Because I spent half my early years waiting on the sidewalk for

the mailman, focused on anything else, looking for a check that often didn't come. The small publishers, quite often, wouldn't pay at all.

Jim: John Santangelo and Ed Levy founded Charlton. Tell me about Ed Levy

Joe: Ed Levy was John Santangelo's partner at Charlton. He had nothing to do with creating anything; he had no function in the firm except as an owner. He and John were partners, but later, Santangelo bought him out. Santangelo and Levy were very different people. Levy was a graduate of Yale, and he had some official position at Waterbury, Connecticut, and he broke some law, and he was in prison for a year. His companion in prison was John Santangelo, so they became partners. It wasn't a state prison, it was a minimum security one in New Haven. And they had lunch catered in, they had the good life. [*laughter*] But when they came out, they were partners in Charlton. Each one of them had a son named Charles, so they called it Charlton

Jim: How would you describe Levy and Santangelo?

Joe: Levy was a very clever man, he was an egghead, a humanitarian, and he was a good man. He collected odd things, like 1750 menus and crap like that. Levy was mainly an investor. Santangelo was an immigrant from Italy, and the last thing in the world you'd imagine him to be would be a publisher. He had no pretensions, he didn't act as though he were a publisher; he was just a hard businessman to do business with. He had a lot of enemies, but I was a friend of his. And he cheated me at cards! [*mutual laughter*] Honest to God, he's a millionaire, and he cheated me at cards! Gin rummy, he marked the deck! [*laughter*] I don't know if saying that is sueable . . .

Jim: Well, he's long dead, he can't sue you!

Joe: That's right. He made a million dollars. It's easy when you start out with $10 million. He got it down to a million. [*laughter*] One point I was making before: we had editors, but none of them were really qualified to be editors, except for Al Fago. Pat Masulli came after Al Fago, and Pat really couldn't judge the story on content or anything else, unless I misspelled "cat." As a matter of fact, I was his designated story editor! So nobody read my stories for wordiness. No matter what I did, it sold, and it was a bargain! [*laughter*] All I'm saying, I couldn't have written the quantity that I did write for your usual editor, because they would be more critical. I would make blunders like, I'd be writing a romance, and I'd go to lunch, and I'd come back, and start using different names for the characters. [*mutual laughter*]

Published photographs of Charlton's co-founder, **John Santangelo, Sr.,** are rare as fox feathers. Here we have a triple bonus with John, Sr., number-one son **Charles,** and CDC head **Allan Adams.** We found this pic, from an unknown Derby-area newspaper, in the files of the Derby Public Library in 1999. Apologies for the poor quality of the multigenerational photocopy. Wonder where the painting hangs now? Photo © 2006 the respective copyright holder.

PRESENTED WITH OIL PAINTING 1/9/57

Pictured above is the formal presentation to John Santangelo, president of the Charlton Press, of an oil painting of himself at the company's plant on Division Street. The presentation was made by Allan Adams, executive vice president of the Capitol Distributing Company. The picture was painted by Carl Benger of New York.

Shown in the picture, left to right are, Mr. Santangelo, Allan Adams and Charles Santangelo.

The great flood of 1955. On Thursday, August 18, Hurricane Diane in its death throes dropped torrential rains on New England ground already saturated from Hurricane Connie the week before. The Naugatuck River running through Derby, CT flooded and overflowed its banks to nearly wipe out the town, putting the Charlton plant under 18 feet of water. The scene above depicts the Center Drive-In projection screen located behind the plant on Division Street. Photo from the Derby Community Home Page, **http://electronicvalley.org/derby**, & © 2006 the respective copyright holder.

Jim: Santangelo didn't care about the content, he just wanted to publish paper and make money. Is that a fair description?

Joe: I think he was mainly concerned with keeping his presses running day and night. He would make a speech at Christmas, and he'd say, "Charlton is a building, a brick wall, very strong, except one wall that has weaknesses. That's the comics." Comics never really made money at Charlton, even though he paid low rates. But he had immigrants from Italy, used them in the press rooms, in every aspect of the printing. For instance, one mistake they made down there was they'd put the covers for *Fightin' Navy* on a romance body! [*laughter*] Honest to god! I packaged magazines for Charlton a lot, but there might be a two-page spread in the middle, or I might have a two-page spread through the title page and illustration, and the pictures might be an inch out of whack on one half of the page. There was no quality at all. No concern with quality. If they knew there was some kind of major mistake, they wouldn't dream of stopping the presses to correct it. They bought the cheapest ink, they had used presses that printed badly. They had the worst distributors. Charlton had Capital Distribution, and they didn't have any roadmen at all. So we could be publishing the best comic books in the field, and we still wouldn't be selling because they offered no inducements. You know, most of the comics that went out went to retailers, and they'd be bound or wired together, and they'd come back bound or wired together. They were never opened. It was just a whistle-in-the-dark business with them.

Jim: We've all heard these stories about Santangelo being connected with the Mafia. Do you have an opinion on that?

Joe: No, he was a businessman. I have no doubt that he would have no compunctions about associating with people in the Mafia. But he wasn't in crime.

Jim: When they had the flood in '55, Santangelo had flood insurance, didn't he?

Joe: Yeah, he had insurance, and in addition, I think he got a big, big wad of money in federal help at zero interest, which he parleyed with real estate and so forth, and zero interest on a couple of million dollars is a big sum of money. So that actually helped to make him financially.

Jim: He didn't have to cut your rates then, did he?

Joe: No, not really. It was something he could do, so he did it.

Jim: Right before Charlton had that big flood, they bought a lot of inventory from companies that were going out of business. They bought from Toby Press, Fawcett, and Simon & Kirby—

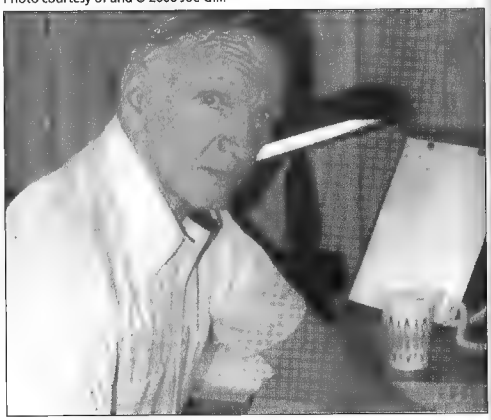
Joe: Yeah, they did buy up stuff, but I was never familiar with the deal, and I was always kind of fuzzy about where they got various properties, and I didn't give a damn, because I had to type as fast as I could. I never had to rewrite any of it.

CHARLTON EDITORS & ARTISTS

Jim: What do you remember about Al and Blanche Fago?

Joe: Al Fago was a wonderful artist. He had a lot of technical skills in photography and printing. His wife was the administrator, but Al was creative. He did a lot of animated comics. *Atomic Mouse.* And on the cover, it would say "Al Fago's Atomic Mouse." He thought that established his ownership. Then he and Santangelo had a grievance later, and Fago was undermined by a couple of people at Charlton, so that he became emotional, and he made it impossible for him to stay on, although they would've kept him, but Fago wouldn't do it. He thought that he owned about six animated comic titles, which he intended to take with him. Levy told John Sr., "Go ahead and publish the titles as Charlton's. Al will get a lawyer, but we'll have more lawyers." So that's what they did, and they just took his titles away from him.

"At home in Seymour, Connecticut, 1970 The beverage is probably lousy coffee." Photo courtesy of and © 2006 Joe Gill.



Jim: Who was undermining Al Fago?

Joe: I do not choose to say.

Jim: What do you remember about Al Fago's brother, Vince?

Joe: Very talented guy, too. I didn't know Vince. He was a friend of my brother's.

Jim: You knew Vince was doing some of the artwork for Al, didn't you?

Joe: I don't think so. You know, I'm like the guy that played the piano in the whorehouse and didn't know what was going on upstairs. Al and Blanche were straight arrows. They were as nice as you could find. They were a wonderful couple.

Jim: Charlton had a New York office for a while. What was the point of that?

Joe: It really was pretension. It wasn't justified. But Charlton bought some titles, a girlie magazine, and they opened the New York office for the prestige. The expense of it was never justified. It was just a bad move.

Jim: What was Pat Masulli hired to do originally?

Joe: Pat was originally hired as a letterer, and that was his only talent. He was a letterer, but he presented a good front, and he was a very shrewd guy. From being a letterer to an editor, that's a pretty big jump! He was a harsh boss. He and I weren't too—we tolerated each other.

Jim: Was he just unfriendly?

Joe: I would say that. [*chuckles*] Although he had friends of his own ilk.

THE LONELY ONE
THE 200 FOOT BEHEMOTH... THIS UNBELIEVABLE FIGMENT OF A SCIENTIST'S BRAIN WHICH HAD BEEN TRANSLATED INTO FLESH AND BLOOD... THIS CREATURE WHICH COULD NOT BE REAL WAS A TERRIBLE FACT, AND HE WAS THIS CREATURE ES, WARM-HEARTED ANIMAL ONCE A PET OF A KINDLY WOMAN AND A WARM-BLOODED MAN... HE HAD CRAVED COMPANIONSHIP IN THOSE LONG-AGO AND HAPPIER DAYS. HE HAD BEEN LOVED AND HE LOVED THEM AND HE REMEMBERED THEIR FRIENDSHIP AND HIS HEART CRIED SILENTLY FOR WHAT HAD BEEN AND WAS NO MORE. THE HUGE PRIMATE REARED HIS MISERY AT THE VAST AND LONELY PLACES WHERE MAN AND HIS WEAPONS HAD DRIVEN HIM... AND URGED HIM BACK TO THE FRINGES OF CIVILIZATION TO SEEK FRUITLESSLY AGAIN FOR SOMEONE TO LOVE WHO COULD LOVE HIM...
YEEEOOOOW
A-2399
1

Joe Gill and Steve Ditko's classic ***Konga.*** This is the splash page to #12, May 1963. Konga © 2006 the respective copyright holder.

Jim: Dick Giordano was working there at the time, too.

Joe: Yeah, and Dick was—still is—a very talented artist.

Jim: He wasn't in editorial until the 1960s, is that right?

Joe: That's right. But Dick was very knowledgeable about every aspect of the comic book business. He had a good brain, and he had enough talent to get along fine. He didn't have the aggressive, ambitious personality that Masulli had.

Jim: Was Masulli the only editor?

Joe: He was the comic book editor at the time, but we had another department that printed some books and random magazines.

Jim: You wrote virtually the entire line, is that right?

Joe: Yeah, and I created every new character, every new comic that'd come out of there. Pat was still taking credit for doing *Doomsday+1* and *Captain Atom*.

Jim: Did you create Captain Atom?

Joe: Sure I did! And *Doomsday+1,* which I liked. I thought that was good.

Jim: That was a good book. I bought that one as a kid. Let me ask you about Captain Atom. Did they ask you for a superhero?

Joe: They said they needed a superhero character. And I said,

"Okay," and I went out to my typewriter and I wrote about a page and a half, and brought it back in. Took me about a half hour.

Jim: What gave you the idea for Captain Atom?

Joe: It just seemed pretty obvious at the time. Nothing gave me the idea, per se.

Jim: Well, Captain Atom sort of plays off the Cold War. [*Joe agrees*] Did you have anything to do with the designing of his costume? That was totally Steve Ditko, wasn't it?

Joe: Yes.

Jim: Captain Atom originally didn't last very long. Were the sales bad?

Joe: The sales were bad for anything we did, because they weren't marketed well.

Jim: What was it like to work with Steve Ditko?

Joe: Ditko and I were drinking buddies for a while, even though he wasn't a drinker. We both lived in the only hotel in town, and we'd have supper together in a nearby bar or restaurant, and we were totally unalike, we had nothing in common. But we hung out together.

Jim: So you drank, and he did not?

Joe: He might have one or two, but he didn't especially care for it.

Jim: I'm under the impression that he was always a quiet person.

Joe: Oh, very, very! He had a nice sense of humor at that time. I think he ran out or used it all up, because the stuff that he writes now for Robin Synder doesn't make any sense. He was very withdrawn. He was devoted to his comic book art, and he used to say that everything he did, no matter who he was working for, if he was working for DC for two times the money, or he was working for Charlton, he still did the same quality work. And he tried to say that he was only in it for the money, and I said, "That's a load of crap. If you're working for Charlton, you'd be drawing art in the dirt with a stick." It was true, he really liked what he was doing. He was very careful.

HERE IS A MADMANS DREAM. . BUT ALMOST A REALITY ! IT IS A VAST GOLDEN PYRAMID DWARFING THE TOWERING MONUMENTS ERECTED BY THE PHARAOHS 5000 YEARS BEFORE . RAISED AT THE COST OF TENS OF THOUSANDS OF LIVES ! BUT, THEY ARE OF GRANITE AND LIMESTONE, CRUDE MATERIALS INDEED, COMPARED TO CHUFRU'S MASSIVE BLOCKS, WHICH SEEM TO BE OF PURE, GLEAMING, GOLD !
HOW SOON ? AND ARE YOU CERTAIN IT WILL BE THE LARGEST EDIFICE EVER ATTEMPTED BY MAN ?
NOTHING WILL EVER EQUAL OR SURPASS IT, MIGHTY PHARAOH OF THE SUN ! AND WITH A FEW MORE TONS OF METAL IT WILL BE FINISHED !
MILITARILY IT HAS NO VALUE !
Nice 1967 Pat Boyette splash page from the unpublished ***Peacemaker*** #6, script by Joe Gill. From a photocopy of the original art, courtesy of Don Mangus. Peacemaker TM & © 2006 DC Comics.

Jim: Charlton didn't give him any more editorial criticism than they gave you, did they?

Joe: No. I don't know. I don't think there was anyone evaluating the work. Anybody who worked at Charlton had total freedom.

Jim: Would Ditko change your scripts?

Joe: All the artists did if they wanted to. I didn't care.

Jim: I knew that Pat Boyette did, but I wondered if Ditko did.

Joe: I can't imagine. I didn't read the comics after they were done. [*mutual laughter*]

Jim: Did you ever discuss your stories with Ditko?

Joe: No. That would slow me down. I didn't discuss the stories with any of the artists.

Jim: What do you remember about Sal Trapani?

Joe: He's an OK guy.

Jim: What about Vince Alascia?

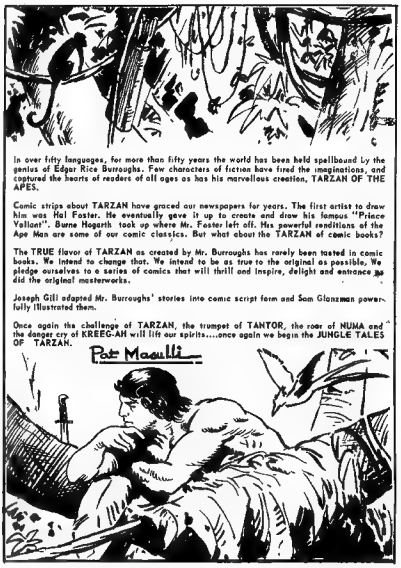
Joe: He was an inker. He was a nice fella, he and I were friends. But he wasn't one of your greatest inkers. If he was doing a *Fightin' Navy* story, the penciler drew a fighter plane, and in a central part of a Navy fighter plane would be the insignia on the tail, and on the fuselage, and so forth. Add a little reality here, or some reality. But he never did that, because he said, "I'm not a letterer." So he had his limitations.

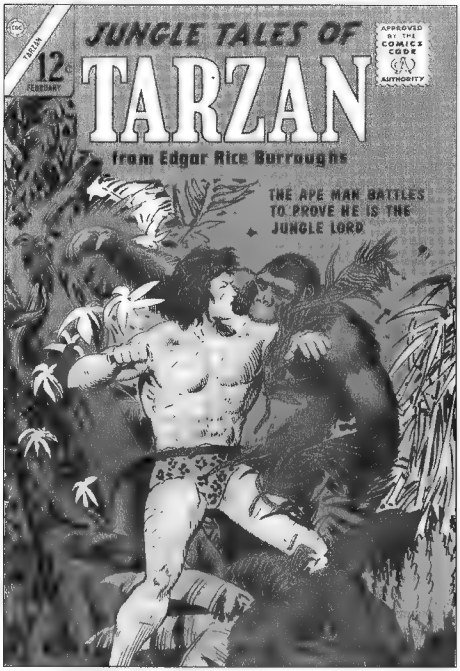
Jim: So Vince just did the bare minimum, then?

Joe: He did his best stuff to his level of competence.

Jim: How about Bill Molno?

Joe: He was a real character, and he was a very skilled, a very talented watercolorist, but he was only in the comics for the money. In showing an army going on foot into tall grass, all we see is bayonets above the grass, [*chuckles*] the soldiers are out of sight. And in another story, there was a destroyer, and


In over fifty languages, for more than fifty years the world has been held spellbound by the genius of Edgar Rice Burroughs. Few characters of fiction have fired the imaginations, and captured the hearts of readers of all ages as has his marvellous creation, TARZAN OF THE APES.
Comic strips about TARZAN have graced our newspapers for years. The first artist to draw him was Hal Foster, he eventually gave it up to create and draw his famous "Prince Valiant". Burne Hogarth took up where Mr. Foster left off. His powerful renditions of the Ape Man are some of our comic classics. But what about the TARZAN of comic books?
The TRUE flavor of TARZAN as created by Mr. Burroughs has rarely been tasted in comic books. We intend to change that. We intend to be as true to the original as possible. We pledge ourselves to a series of comics that will thrill and inspire, delight and entrance as did the original masterworks.
Joseph Gill adapted Mr. Burroughs' stories into comic script form and Sam Glanzman powerfully illustrated them.
Once again the challenge of TARZAN, the trumpet of TANTOR, the roar of NUMA and the danger cry of KREEG-AH will lift our spirits....once again we begin the JUNGLE TALES OF TARZAN.
Pat Masulli



Above: Pat Masulli's frontispiece to Charlton's ***Jungle Tales of Tarzan*** #1, Dec. 1964. ***Right:*** Sam Glanzman's cover to #2, Feb. 1965 Tarzan TM & © 2006 the respective copyright holder.

a tagalong, and I think an LST, and they all looked the same! [*laughter*] But he was giving Charlton what he was paid for, and he made more money than any of the other staff did, because he turned the crap out like it was crap!

Jim: Did you know him very well?

Joe: Bill? Yeah, he and I and Rocke Mastroserio, who was a good artist, we shared a flat in 1956, in Derby. It was $18 a month, so we paid $6 apiece. [*mutual laughter*] I heard that Molno went to a fairly pretentious den or party in New York, I don't know where. There was a swimming pool there, and he jumped in the pool with his clothes on. [*mutual laughter*] A friend of mine told me about it. Molno was a great guy, he had a wild sense of humor. He'd drink beer, but he wasn't anywhere near the alcoholic I was. I quit drinking in 1956.

Jim: What do you remember about Rocke Mastroserio?

Joe: Oh, Rocke, he was a great guy. He was deaf and he loved his artwork. He was a good artist. He and I were best friends. I talked a lot, and he didn't hear me because he was deaf. We got along great! He loved to gamble.

Jim: Did you know Charles Nicholas?

Joe: Yeah. He was a great guy. Charlie was a better artist when he came to Charlton, he was a good penciler. But when he worked for Charlton, he had to make it simple, he had to simplify his pencils, because he had Alascia and Trapani doing the inking, and they were the monkey on Charlie's back. He couldn't do his best anymore. All he could do was what would be easiest for them to ink. So that, in a matter of years, it became pretty dull art.

Jim: Did you ever know Jack Keller? He drew a lot of the hot rod comics you wrote.

Joe: I didn't know him, but we talked on the phone sometimes.

Jim: I liked those racing comics. I thought they were fun.

Joe: Yeah, they were. I liked doing them. I did one of them for DC: *Hot Wheels,* with art by Alex Toth. Alex told several people he'd rather work from my scripts than any other writer in the business. That's quite a compliment!

Jim: Charlton published *Jungle Tales of Tarzan,* in 1964–65. I heard that Charlton got in trouble because they didn't have the license to publish Tarzan.

Joe: You know why Charlton got in trouble? At the time, Allan Adams, who was the head of Capital Distribution, had come to some kind of agreement with the Tarzan Memorial Foundation or something, that licensed the rights, and he was publishing Tarzan books. But because Tarzan was an old, old title, and a

lot of the trademark rights had expired over a period of years, now it was public domain, so Adams was publishing it. He was paying a ghost writer to write Tarzan novels. In the meantime, I was doing the comic, and they never had a complaint about the comic. But Adams—I told you how stupid everybody was down there—this guy would start out with a couple of original pages, and then he would insert, verbatim, the middle and end of a Tarzan book that had been published. So he was plagiarizing, and that's what it was all about. But even when the verdict against Charlton was reached, there was never a complaint about the comic.

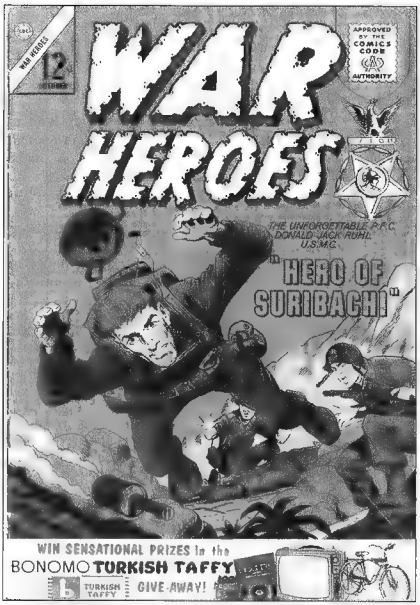
Jim: Who did the plagiarizing?

Joe: A writer that Adams had hired, I never knew the name. But the comic was a well-done book. That was well-done art and story. I was an Edgar Rice Burroughs fan, and I tried to make the dialogue and so forth as close to Burroughs as I could. I think I did. I asked editor Wally Green, at Western Comics, for work, and he wanted me to write *Boris Karloff*. I didn't want to do that. I said, "Give me one of your simpler ones, like *Tarzan*." He said, "Oh, we've got a writer for that." And he had been ridiculing the quality of Charlton comics, which he's entitled to do. I said, "Our Tarzan comic was better than your Tarzan comic." He said, "Yeah, but that was a special kind of project. You got paid extra for that." I said, "I did like hell!" We got paid the same for good stuff as bad stuff.

Jim: Sam Glanzman was the artist on the *Tarzan* comic.

Joe: Oh, jeez, Sam Glanzman is one of the best artists there ever was. He did a lot of war stories for Charlton, and he could draw an old World War II freighter that looked just exactly right. His characters, he told me once that he had been criticized because he wasn't good at drawing faces. He got a lot of true expressions on his faces—without saying they were perfect—but he really was a good war artist. He and I are good friends. Dick Giordano at DC, they were discussing a series of comic books, a very ambitious history of World War II in comic books. Sam was chosen to be the artist, and I was picked to be the writer. We did quite a bit of planning and synopses and creative stuff, Glanzman did some and I did some, then Dick Giordano had both of us down to this nice restaurant in New York, where we discussed how great this comic book would be, and Dick assured us that there was no doubt it was going to be done, and we were going to be rich. And then we went home and they forgot all about it, and he said that we were going to be paid for what we had done, the time we had spent, and never got a nickel! Giordano . . . *[laughs]* He's a good company man, but he was working for DC, not me!

Speaking of unauthorized, Charlton was doing a comic book called *War Heroes,* and someone provided me with a bound book, and it had these citations, and for each one of the recipients of the Medal of Honor it would describe the action in which they participated that they were giving the medal for. One time in particular, a Marine who dived on a hand grenade to save the lives of his companions—which I always thought is a lot of crap—I don't think anybody would really dive on a hand grenade to save their companions. They just got their asses blown off, and then they wrote up a nice story to justify the medal. So, I'm a scatterer. I miss details when I read something, but I had gone to Burt Levey, who was one of the executives above, he was a cousin of Ed Levy, and I told him, "A lot of these people who we're giving the Medal of Honor are still alive. Another thing,



War Heroes #5, Oct. 1963. © Charlton Comics Group.

the people in there who are probably some black, some Indian, some blond, some brunette, they're being created by artists who don't know what they look like. You might have a Medal of Honor winner who's a Negro, and you show him as a blue-eyed, blond-haired GI. You're going to get in trouble!" And he insisted on using their names! Everything had to be authentic! So I pulled a story out of there, a Medal of Honor winner who dove on a hand grenade, and was blown up—except that I didn't finish the last sentence. So,we published the story, and bingo, we got sued. *[laughter]* The guy was a quadruple amputee, and he sued Charlton because we didn't portray it accurately, and we'd used his name. They had to pay, I think, something like $7,000.

Jim: Well, they deserved it!

Joe: Oh, yeah! But they shouldn't have been doing it!

Jim: Let me ask you about a few titles you wrote. One of them was *Hercules,* with Sam Glanzman.

Joe: Yeah, Sam took a lot of pride in his work, even for the lousy rates at Charlton.

Jim: Did you write *Judomaster*?

Joe: No, Frank McLaughlin did. He and I are good friends yet. Frank was a very young guy when he was working at Charlton. He was just young. He learned to be a comic book artist. I believe *Judomaster* was popular. But no comic book that Charlton did could ever really be acceptable as long as it was printed by

Charlton and sold by Charlton.

Jim: You wrote some *Jungle Jim,* and you wrote some *Blue Beetle.* You didn't like that character, did you?

Joe: I think I did write some of them. I was never nuts about superheroes.

Jim: But you liked mystery stories, didn't you? And you wrote a lot of humor stuff.

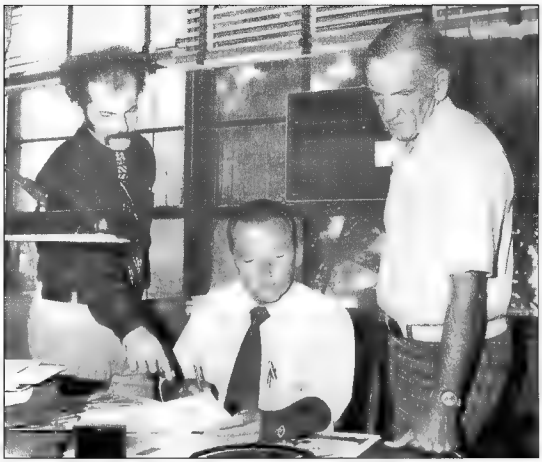
Joe: Oh, yeah, tons of it. I loved doing the Hanna-Barbera stuff. As a matter of fact, I preferred the animated comics.

Jim: Did you feel they were the easiest to write?

Joe: Yeah. I have a bawdy sense of humor.

Jim: Did you feel any proprietary sense towards a certain character when you were the regular writer, or was it just an assignment to you?

Joe: I probably did it as a matter of routine. I did a shopping list. I'd probably have five comics down there. *Love, First Kiss, Fightin' Navy, Cheyenne Kid,* Captain Atom, you know. I just started at the top and worked my way to the bottom.



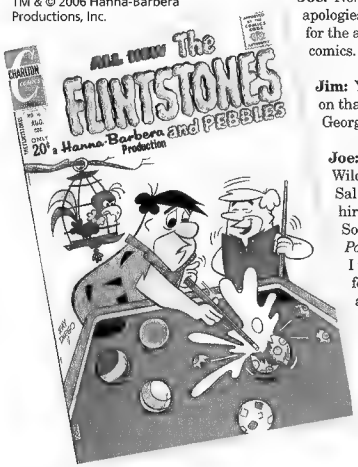
Charlton Comics editorial staff, 1973: Assistant Editor Nicola Cuti, Executive Editor George Wildman, and chief writer Joe Gill This photo and accompanying interview with Wildman originally appeared in ***Cartoonist PROfiles*** #20, Dec. 1973. Photo by Paula Hopper & © 2006 the Estate of Jud Hurd.

Jim: When you wrote humor, like *The Flintstones,* did you have to get script approval from Hanna-Barbera?

Joe: No, we had approval.

Jim: So you didn't have interference from Hanna-Barbera at all, then?

The Flintstones #16, Aug. 1972.
TM & © 2006 Hanna-Barbera Productions, Inc.



Joe: No. I have no apologies to make for the animated comics.

Jim: Your editor on that was that George Wildman.

Joe: George Wildman, yeah. Sal Gentile hired him. So there was *Popeye,* and I wrote the feature. After a while, George became the original creator of Popeye. [*mutual laughter*]

Jim: How did Gentile come into the company?

Joe: I don't know what his function was, but he was working for the magazine part of the publishing. He was working for Billy Anderson, who was the music book editor. Sal was doing part of the layouts, I guess, and when the opening occurred in the comics, Sal was the nearest warm body!

Jim: What was Sal like as an editor?

Joe: He wasn't too creative. He made several mistakes. He hired George Wildman. [*laughter*] He was a genial, nice, yielding sort of guy. He was well-intentioned, and he made no pretensions. He just did the job. He made a lot of work out of very little.

Jim: You wrote *Konga* and *Gorgo.*

Joe: Oh, yeah, I enjoyed doing those.

Jim: It seems like after a while it'd be hard to come up with ideas for something like *Konga.*

Joe: Well, you had to make them a sympathetic character. I think I did a decent job on them.

Jim: Yes you did! Ditko drew it. Was Ditko basically the top artist at Charlton?

Joe: No, I think Dick Giordano was. Well, Ditko is well thought of. He had a style, and that's something most of the artists didn't. He was one of the top artists.

Jim: Do you remember writing a character called Nature Boy?

Joe: Yeah. I don't remember much about it, though.

Jim: You also wrote the *Six Million Dollar Man*.

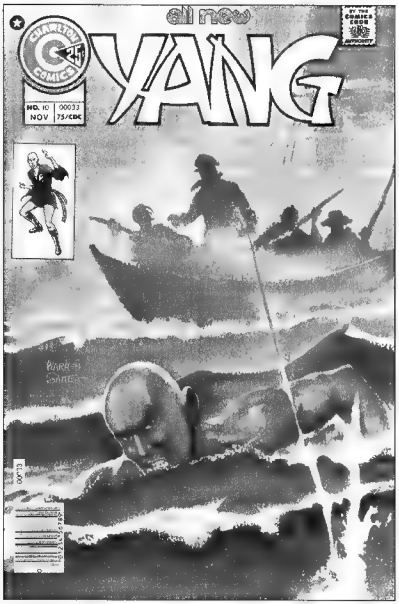
Joe: George Wildman and I flew out to Los Angeles to meet executives of Universal. I had not been drinking, but I had a couple of martinis on the flight, and I spent the next week drinking. We had this conference and George didn't say much, but we came to an agreement. When we talked about it at Charlton, I didn't think *The Six Million Dollar Man* or *Emergency!* would sell. And they didn't. I think we paid quite a bit for the rights.

Jim: Did you create *Yang*?

Joe: Yes. It was based on the yin-yang thing. There was the title and everything. That first issue, I thought was pretty well done. Sanho Kim did a good job. [*chuckles*] Kim ran into trouble later, because, well, he got kind of cocky. There was a cat, and it was just for color, I guess, and Kim drew it pretty accurately, pissing away with his tail up in the air, and the asshole and great detail! [*laughter*] Nobody picked it out before it was done! It was printed that way! [*mutual laughter*] Kim and I never had any friendly discussions.

Jim: Was *Yang* inspired by the *Kung Fu* television series or influenced by the Bruce Lee movies?

Yang #10, Nov. 1975, with a beautiful Warren Sattler watercolor cover © Charlton Comics Group.



Za Za the Mystic #11, Sept. 1956 © Charlton Comics Group.

Joe: I don't know. I was aware, probably, of *Kung Fu* at the time. I don't remember ever being influenced by anything. Including my wife! [*laughter*]

Jim: All right! Not going to go there! [*mutual laughter*] Let me ask you about a couple more artists, like Tom Sutton.

Joe: Oh, Sutton was a great guy. He and I had a lot of respect for each other. I don't remember meeting Sutton, we just talked on the phone a lot. He died, didn't he?

Jim: Yes, unexpectedly. I talked to him a week before he died, he had a cold he couldn't get rid of. I think he had pneumonia and didn't know it.

Joe: I just recovered from pneumonia, and I didn't know I had it. I think I had it for a couple of weeks before I went to the hospital. I really got dragged down.

Jim: I'm so glad you recovered. But Tom did not. Tom was sicker than he realized.

Joe: Oh, I didn't know that. I had no inkling. He and Cuti were pretty palsy. Cuti's a great guy. He called me up this morning! Nick was a comic buff. He read comic books as a youngster, and I think he worked with Wally Wood. Wally Wood was his god. I think he saw himself more as an artist when he first started, but he became an assistant editor. He was a very pleasant fellow. He's *still* buried in comics; I could never see it! I never read a comic for content in my life! I mean, I wouldn't spend a dime to buy a comic book.

Jim: Well, they cost about $3 now, so you couldn't!

Joe: I hope the readers are getting more now than they did for a dime!

Jim: Did you know Joe Staton? He did *E-Man*.

Joe: Of course I know Joe Staton. He and Nick were good buddies.

Jim: Did you know Jim Aparo?

Joe: I thought the world of Jim's work, and he liked doing my scripts. Pat Boyette loved doing my stories.

Jim: Pat Boyette used to talk about you a lot. He loved you, you know.

Joe: Oh, we talked all the time on the telephone. I loved him. He and I were great friends. We never met. He'd invite me down there [to Texas], but I never went. We were close friends, as close as you can get on the phone. He was involved in radio, and he also did small "B" movie productions. He was trying to get me involved, but I didn't lead with the idea. It always fell through.

Pat was a very good artist. He did one character of mine—the Peacemaker—and he did a good job, he liked working on it. He made no pretensions. He and I always worked together very well. He'd read the script, and call me up, and say, "Can I change this and can I change that?" I'd say, "Sure, change anything you want! What the hell do I care?" Charlton would just trample all over the product anyhow, it didn't matter. Pat had a wonderful personality.

Jim: Did you know Pete Morisi?

Joe: We coexisted, but I don't think I met him.

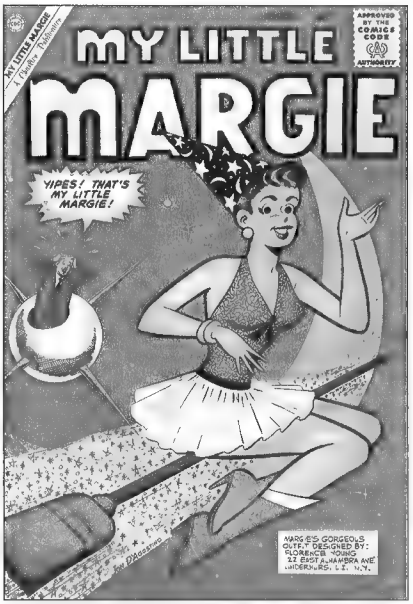
Jim: Did you ever meet Don Newton? He did *The Phantom* after Jim Aparo.

Joe: Oh, yeah. That was all right.

Jim: You wrote *The Phantom*. Pat Boyette found *The Phantom* hard to get into. Were there some characters that were harder for you to write than others?

Joe: I'd tell Charlton early on that any new title had to be easily identified by its title as a category that was being bought. A western title had to sound western in order to be picked off the stands by people who liked westerns. *Za Za* never found any category like that. *Nature Boy*! Who the hell would buy *Nature Boy* except a nudist? [*laughter*] They didn't have much sense at Charlton, I'll tell you.

Ed Levy was going to have lunch somewhere, and there was a fortune teller there named Za Za. Levy had no knowledge of the publishing business, the creative half of the business. And he came back up and says, "We're going to have a story about Miss Za Za the Mystic." We're going to do a comic book about Za Za the Mystic. So I had to write all this crap about Za Za the Mystic, and she would solve crimes, you know, all kinds of crap. I doubt if there was ever a good Za Za script done.


MY LITTLE MARGIE
A Fawcett Publication
APPROVED BY THE COMICS CODE AUTHORITY
MY LITTLE MARGIE
YIPES! THAT'S MY LITTLE MARGIE!
MARGIE'S GORGEOUS OUTFIT DESIGNED BY: FLORENCE YOUNG 22 EAST ALAMBRA AVE. HEMPSTEAD, L.I., N.Y.

Yep, that's ***My Little Margie*** #33, Dec. 1960, cover by Jon D'Agostino. Margie TM & © the respective copyright holder.

Jim: Do you have any idea what Charlton comics were the best sellers?

Joe: I have no idea. Probably something I wrote. [*mutual laughter*]

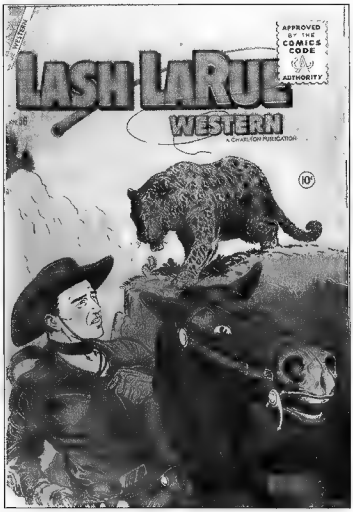
Jim: We'll go with that!

Joe: I've got the odds on my side.

Jim: I think you do! [*laughter*] Did you know Jon D'Agostino?

Joe: Jonny and I were buddies. He always stuttered. That was the first thing you noticed about him. And he liked hunting. He didn't have much luck. He went hunting on opening day in New York state. It was about 5:30 in the morning. He was driving to New York, and a deer ran across, and he hit the deer. The deer was dead. So he took the deer, which you're always supposed to do, to the nearest game warden. I don't know how they found it. But the game warden says, "You keep the deer," and he took the permit, and Jonny was over for the day! He took the deer back to Connecticut. He just wanted a deer picture. He hurt his back lifting the deer to let it bleed. Anyway, a friend of mine agreed to butcher the deer for him, but when he got the deer home, the deer was a mass of bruises, and the meat was inedible. It cost him $200 to fix his car. And that was Jonny's hunting for the year.

Jonny was a letterer. He sat next to me, and he'd be complaining about the length of the dialogue. So he gave me the script, and I crossed out about three lines and said, "There, is that all right?" I didn't question, didn't pay any attention to the content, whether it was affecting the story. I always limited my dialogue. I think he was getting fifty cents a page to letter. He was going blind doing it.



Tense Stan Campbell cover to ***Lash LaRue Western*** #56, July 1955. © Charlton Comics Group.

been a pretty good gardener! Jonny and Pat Masulli would have discussions about it.

Jim: What did you think of Vince Colletta?

Joe: Not much. I think he and Pat Masulli were friends. Vinnie came up one time with his bodyguard, and his bodyguard had a gun. They were strutting around the office, showing the gun. Pat liked guns. As a matter of fact, he got a gun permit later. Maybe he felt one of his writers was going to attack him. [*laughter*] I said, "You're impersonating a cop, ain't you?" "Yeah," he said, "he's a security guy!" He was posing as a tough guy.

Jim: Did you ever meet Stan Campbell?

Joe: Oh, yeah, Stan and I were good friends. He and I spent a lot of time together. I think he was from New York or New Jersey, but he'd come up here and work up here all week. He always wore cowboy boots and a cowboy hat. He dressed as a cowboy all the time, so I suggested one day we go and hire some horses. I had ridden probably once or twice in my life, and Stan said, "Shit no, I'm afraid of them fuckers!" [*mutual laughter*] He was about my age, if not a little younger. I was 36 when I came up here.

Jim: What do you remember about Chic Stone?

Joe: Chic Stone was brought up here with the original group. Al Fago knew everybody in comics anyhow, but he recruited various artists, Charlie Nicholas, Jon D'Agostino, Dick [Giordano], Chic Stone, and Stan Campbell. Chic was a pretty smooth guy. He had his stuff together. He bought a new car, a Buick convertible, I think it was a '55. I was drinking, so he came in the bar while I was having lunch, I guess, and he said, "Do you want to drive?" [*laughter*] And I ran it into a building. It had power steering. I'd never used power steering before, and I oversteered going around a corner!

Jim: Ouch! Did you know Tony Tallarico?

Joe: Very well. Tony was a friend of my brother's, for one thing. He and I worked on something outside, I don't know what it was, besides Charlton. But Tony was a steady contributor to Charlton Comics. I always liked him. He was a lot of fun.

Jim: He and Bill Fraccio drew the *Blue Beetle* that you worked on.

Joe: Yeah. I tried to steer away from superheroes, and my own superheroes were totally different than the crap that was turned out at DC. The stories from DC were more successful, they were like soap operas, you know. They would continue a story with characters from previous comics, and quite often, there'd be an asterisk saying, "See volume 3, book 4," for reference. Any stuff I wrote for superheroes or semisuperheroes were self-contained stories that had a beginning, a middle, and an end.

Jim: Where did you get the idea for the Peacemaker?

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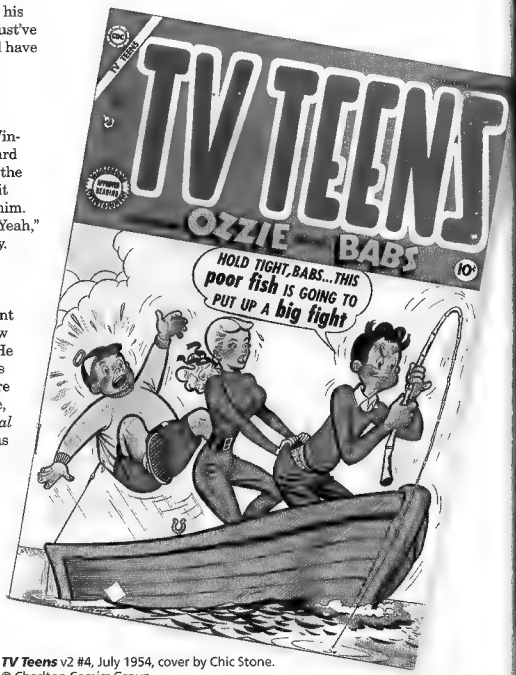


TV Teens v2 #4, July 1954, cover by Chic Stone. © Charlton Comics Group.

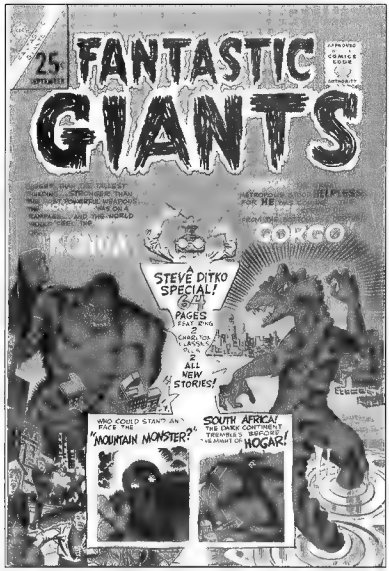
Joe: They asked for a new title, and I thought it was a good one. I never devoted any more than a half hour to conceiving something like that.

Jim: He's an interesting character, because he's a hero who fights for peace. He's a little bit different than your average superhero. I was wondering how you got the inspiration for him.

Joe: I know it was original. It was a good idea. I wouldn't call it inspiration. I got ideas very, very quickly, and once I had it, I'd flesh it out and finish up. It took me a half hour to do Captain Atom, to type out the idea and so forth. *Yang* was a different area: it was in a different time, the time of the Old West, and rigged ships. I liked the ships story. I think I had read the yin-yang bit about the Chinese somewhere around that time, and it seemed like a good idea.

Jim: Did you know Steve Skeates?

Joe: Yeah, he was a writer. He was one of Dick's later acquisitions, and he got very favorable treatment down at DC, I think.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The unique Steve Ditko–Joe Gill one-shot special ***Fantastic Giants*** v2 #24, Sept. 1966, combined both the ***Gorgo*** and ***Konga*** titles. G & K © the respective copyright holders.

Jim: Did you get to know Denny O'Neil at all?

Joe: No. I know that Denny had a very large ego.

Jim: There was a writer in the mid- to late-'60s who signed his name "Norm De Plume." Do you know who that was?

Joe: [*chuckles*] It might've been some important writer like O'Neil.

Jim: I was thinking perhaps it might've been somebody like Pat Masulli or Sal Gentile, who was actually working at Charlton.

Joe: No. [*chuckles*] Pat Masulli couldn't write. His wife wrote a couple of things that were awful. I said they stunk and shouldn't be used, and he used them.

Jim: Do you remember Bill Montes? He was a penciler there, and the guy who usually inked him was Ernie Bache.

Joe: I remember Bache, I know he did a lot of work, but I didn't know him. I don't think we were on the same page. They were quite often critical of what I did for them, and I trusted Alex Toth's judgment better than I did theirs.

Jim: So would I! Nobody knows good stuff better than Alex. For a little while in the late '50s, John Severin worked at Charlton.

Joe: He was a talented guy. He was in the office off and on, but I don't think I was ever introduced to him. Al Williamson did some work there and he was another great artist. I didn't meet him. He would have had contact with Pat Masulli.

Jim: There are a few people who worked there in the 1970s I'd like to ask you about, like Bob Layton.

Joe: Oh, Bob, yes, another negative. He was a self-promoter. You know, it irritated me insofar as there were so many big egos with little talent coming around, and they were often accepted on their own evaluation, rather than what they really were, and Layton, to me, was one of those. He was a conniver, and he was worming his way everywhere, and I never had a high opinion of him. He sort of sold a bill of goods to [Nick] Cuti. Nick was impressed by Layton for some reason. Nick is a nice guy, I'm all for him, but he thought that Layton and a lot of guys like him were number one.

Jim: Did you ever meet John Byrne?

Joe: No. I spoke to him many, many times on the phone. There was another character. Byrne became a huge success. He started working on *Doomsday +1*, and he did a great job, but after he did about three, he started complaining to the editor he could write better stories than I could. That's not a pleasant thing to hear, because I was helpful to him in the beginning. We talked quite often, and he was way the hell up in Canada. But Byrne made it big.

Jim: I'd like to ask you about some humor artists that worked at Charlton: Ray Dirgo.

Joe: Ray Dirgo and I were friends. Ray had worked for higher rates for New York publishers, and I guess he was running dry on assignments, so he had to begin to accept work from Charlton. He always thought that was beneath him. He was a pleasant, amiable man, and he was a good worker. He wasn't an inspired artist, but he was competent.

Jim: Frank Johnston.

Joe: I knew him. Yeah, a nice guy. He went on to bigger and better things. We were only casual acquaintances.

Jim: When the new writers were coming along at Charlton, how did you feel about that? Did it reduce your output?

Joe: I had an uninterrupted flow of work, and I didn't like some of the guys we hired. O'Neil and Skeates, they were always at

another level. They were paid over scale by Dick in order to produce a better magazine, improve the quality of the comics. It didn't last long, because they all sold like crap. We could've been selling *Superman,* and we'd have only sold about 15%, because we didn't have the organization. John [Santangelo]'s idea of doing everything cheap, under one roof, backfired on him, because he got crap. He paid crap.

Jim: Do you remember Wayne Howard?

Joe: Wayne was a nice guy. He married a girl who was the sister of a girl who worked for Wildman. He wasn't with us that long, not a substantial period of time. He didn't work in the office. I liked him, he was a regular guy. He wasn't super-talented, but he was competent, very quiet.

Jim: When did you do the King Features work?

Joe: When Wildman was editor, 1972–'73. I wrote a 15-book series for King Features for young children in the early teens, on choosing an occupation. Popeye was the narrator, Wildman did the art. I wrote about transportation, another one would be about mechanics, another about salesmen. There were 15 categories, and I wrote one for each category.

Jim: The assistant editor who replaced Nick was Bill Pearson.

Joe: Bill Pearson was a comic buff. He knew *everything* about comics. The comic buffs, they used to write complaining letters about the characters. "This story or that story . . ." If they had known the conditions under which they were written, they might have been less critical. Bill and I got along well. We were totally dissimilar. We had nothing in common.

Jim: John Wren worked there in the 1980s.

Joe: Oh, yeah, he was a gofer. He didn't ever do anything creative that I know of.

THE END OF CHARLTON COMICS

Jim: When did you stop writing comics for Charlton?

Joe: I wrote comics until 1976, I was doing a full schedule, and I was making seven or eight hundred bucks a week, and that was good at that time. All of us went out to lunch, and when we came back from lunch, Greta, George Wildman's secretary, was at her desk. I said, "Hi, Greta, blah blah blah," and she says, "You're fired." No warning, no inkling, not a hint . . . everybody in the place was fired. [*chuckles*]

Jim: What reason were you given?

Joe: They just stopped publishing comics. That's understandable. I had expected to hear it in 1966, too! [*mutual laughter*]

Jim: When did you finally quit Charlton?

Joe: I think I stopped going down to the office about 1990. It wasn't paying anymore.

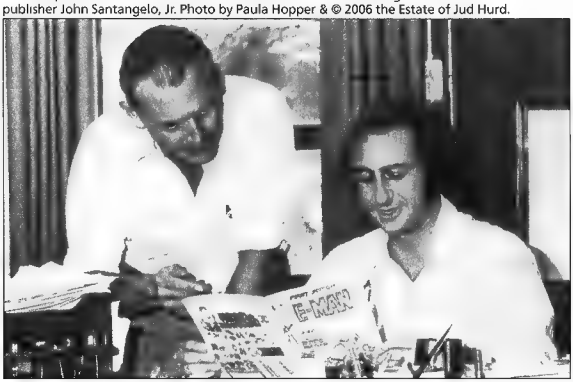
Jim: So when you quit doing the comic books, you still worked for them.

Joe: Yeah. John Santangelo, Jr., was the publisher. At the time he cancelled the comics, he saw me and he tells me, "I'll see that they keep you busy upstairs with magazines to write." Romance, I was writing that right along. Of course, they didn't get the message upstairs. [*chuckles*] I mean, for as much work as John thought I would get, John thought I'd be well set!

Jim: You became editor of the magazine line at some point, didn't you?

Joe: No, only the magazines that I packaged. I packaged a dozen different titles in a dozen different areas for 20 or 30 years. I think one was *Combat Illustrated*. That was pretty good. Another was a history magazine, *Battles and Whatever,* I wrote something about the Roman Legions in there, maybe the Spanish-American War, and the Civil War.

Another photo from ***Cartoonist PROfiles*** #20: comics editor George Wildman with Charlton publisher John Santangelo, Jr. Photo by Paula Hopper & © 2006 the Estate of Jud Hurd.



Jim: Did you have a budget? Did they pay you a certain amount?

Joe: I got $7600 an issue for the history magazine I wrote. It would cost me maybe $2500 to produce, so I'd make $5000. It took a little talent to put out that quality of magazine. Even though, when it was printed, it didn't have the greatest printing in the world, the pictures across the fold of the book would be out of register a half-inch. When I worked for Charlton as a comic book writer, anything that had to be written, any new title, they would come to me and say, "Could you do it?" I was carrying a full load of comics, and [Allan] Adams, the head of Capital, got the bright idea that the boating magazines were selling well. This he discovered in March of the year, when the boating magazines would hit the stands. So he comes back to the office, so hot, and said, "We need a boating magazine. So, Joe, could you write a boating

magazine?" Yeah, I could write anything. I said, "Okay." "How long will this take?" I said, "About two weeks." And I wrote a small book, about 60 or 70 pages, a magazine; it was in-between. It was like *Reader's Digest*. But I went and got navigational maps of the East Coast, and I did a bunch of stuff about small boat maintenance, and then about safety and so forth, you know. I fooled them, I got $500, and I was writing my comics at the same time. And then I did another title on the Wild West. I would do the whole book. I would write history magazines. And then, we were sporadic publishers of women's confession magazines. I wrote about nine million of them. I got the whole book, five or six stories, and I got $2000 for that, but I had to buy the cover picture, photographs from inside, so it cut it back to about $1500.

"The genius pauses while creating an unforgettable whatchamacallit. Probably 1975, the Charlton office." Photo courtesy of and © 2006 Joe Gill.

Jim: You're listed as being the editor at Harrison Publications in 1950.

Joe: I was an editor? [*laughs*] Somebody seriously designated me as story editor, and that's like putting the fox in charge of the henhouse.

Jim: Who was Harrison Publications?

Joe: Charlton.

Jim: What was John Jr. like?

Joe: He was short. He was essentially an Italian peasant, and no matter how much money he got, it didn't change him any. He didn't change his lifestyle or anything. He had a nice wife, Carrie. He was a lousy father, I think. He gambled a lot. John Jr. is still alive, and he's living in a very substantial mansion in New Haven. I wouldn't say much for John. His brother Charlie and I are good friends. I saw him recently. Charlie is not a pillar of the community. But he's a good guy, and he is a great friend to me.

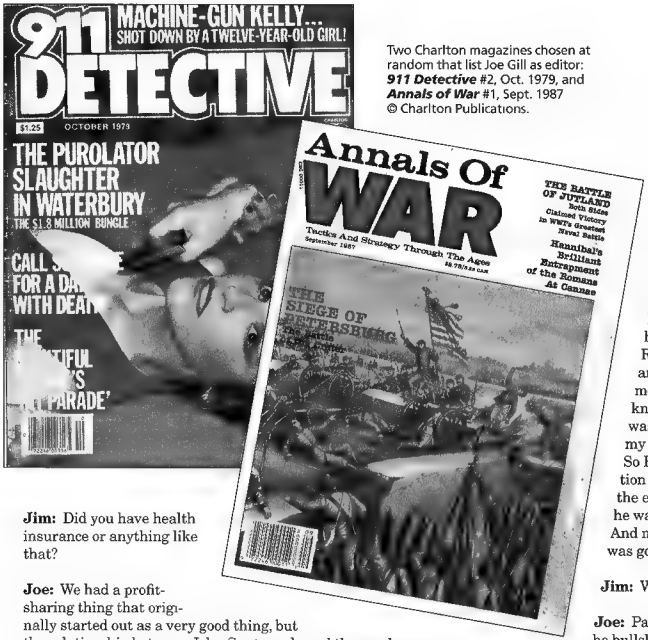
Jim: Tell me more about Santangelo Sr.'s children. Did any of them take an active interest in the company?

Joe: He had three children. Charlie was the oldest, his daughter Elsie was middle, and Johnny was the youngest. John Sr. resigned as publisher, and he appointed Charlie as his publisher. Charlie was a very earthy kind of guy, he was a smart guy, but he was also cunning. He was a likeable guy, and he read better quality books than I did. But he didn't like wearing a suit, and a shirt and tie, and he wasn't comfortable with the people he met. There were some big pains in the ass in the comic book business. He didn't like associating with them and pretending to speak the King's English instead of the crap that we talk in the Naugatuck Valley. He resigned after about six months. He took a settlement from his father for his inheritance, and he bought some businesses and some real estate. Charlie's doing just fine. As publisher, Johnny was more adapted to the routine of trying to put on a front, and he was absolutely without taste. But he had aspirations. A pain in the ass. [*laughter*] See, Charlton's trouble was that they started with local boys working in the shop as hi-lo operators, and when a key employee died, they'd move one of the hi-lo operators up to his job. And everybody was working for less than people with similar jobs at other publishers. Johnny controlled the financials. He was as dumb as a picket fence, but he was a local boy, and he was a survivor. And it was similar with other top executives who floated to the top. They were local boys without a college education who were promoted beyond their competence. So Charlton didn't really get much of a chance to ever be successful. At one point, John Sr. made his son-in-law, Ron Scott, the publisher. Ron is still alive and well, and living in Derby. I don't want to denigrate him in any way. He was trying to do a difficult job. The Charlton company didn't publish quality magazines. Their equipment was inferior, and they paid low rates for what they did, and got what they deserved! I worked without supervision. I wrote more than anybody else, but I wrote without the usual hindrances that a writer faces when he's writing, where it had to be done well, otherwise it would be rejected.

Rorrald T. Scott, erstwhile Charlton publisher. From a photocopy page of ***Who's Who of Independent Distribution—1969,*** where he's listed as VP & GM of CDC. Courtesy of Michael Feldman.

Jim: That's why you liked it! [*laughs*]

Joe: Yeah, yeah! So I didn't have to pound the pavement and go kiss ass with editing. I got my assignments every week.


911 DETECTIVE
MACHINE-GUN KELLY...
SHOT DOWN BY A TWELVE-YEAR-OLD GIRL!
$1.25
OCTOBER 1979
THE PUROLATOR SLAUGHTER IN WATERBURY
THE $1.8 MILLION BUNGLE
Annals Of WAR
Tactics And Strategy Through The Ages
THE BATTLE OF JUTLAND
Both Sides Claimed Victory in WWI's Greatest Naval Battle
Hannibal's Brilliant Entrapment of the Romans At Cannae
THE SIEGE OF PETERSBURG

Two Charlton magazines chosen at random that list Joe Gill as editor: ***911 Detective*** #2, Oct. 1979, and ***Annals of War*** #1, Sept. 1987 © Charlton Publications.

Jim: Did you have health insurance or anything like that?

Joe: We had a profit-sharing thing that originally started out as a very good thing, but the relationship between John Santangelo and the employees changed after the employees tried to go union. There was a lot less profits to be shared, because it was a matter of bookkeeping between Charlton, which was a parent company of the profit-sharing, and the other companies that John owned, which charged Charlton for their services. They could very easily eat away all of Charlton's profits, and show no profits for any of the companies.

Jim: How long was Scott in charge?

Joe: A couple of years, I guess. Probably the early '70s. This is all guesswork. He was replaced by John Jr.

Jim: I get the impression that Scott wasn't really good at his job.

Joe: No, I don't think he was. I don't think that he was in touch with reality. He wanted to do things in a grander manner, and Santangelo wouldn't allow him to do it.

Jim: Would you say he was probably frustrated?

Joe: Yeah. You know, Charlton was *not* a very professional organization. A lot of the senior officers of the company had begun as highway drivers or sweepers or magazine shovelers, and they just rose to the top.

Jim: Did Scott have much power?

Joe: Well, he was married to Elsie Santangelo, and I don't know who ruled the roost in that marriage. [*mutual laughter*] Santangelo had him by the balls, whether he was in bed or out of it.

Jim: So Scott only had so much power, because it was a family operation?

Joe: Yeah. Pat Masulli was the major domo upstairs. He was the executive editor, and *he* had power. I didn't like him, and he didn't like me. Pat was dictatorial, and he had a stronger personality than Ron Scott. He would come down and argue his points with Ron. One morning, Pat came down—I don't know what trivial bit of business it was—but he said, "If you don't do it my way, you'll have my resignation!" So Ron says, "Good, have your resignation on my desk by noon." And that was the end of Pat. He was in midstride, and he was shot down. That's how he left. And nobody was unhappy that Masulli was gone.

Jim: Why did they keep him, then?

Joe: Pat projected an aura of efficiency and he bullshitted everybody. He was a letterer and a colorist when he came to Charlton! I was a colorist when I was in kindergarten. [*laughter*]

Jim: Was Scott creative in any way?

Joe: No, not at all. Nobody in the organization was creative. Except me. Pat Masulli never created anything. He took credit for it, but he never created anything. You can ask Frank McLaughlin about that.

Jim: Would you say that neither Charles nor John Santangelo was creative?

Joe: John Santangelo Sr. was a very shrewd and capable man. He was exceedingly untrustworthy to do business with. He was a friend of mine, and he cheated me when he could, but I liked him. There was no bullshit about him.

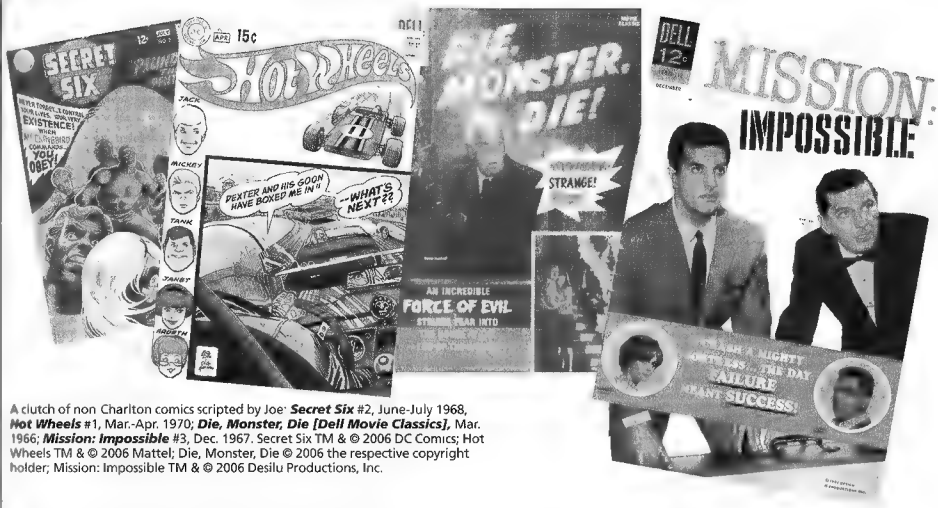
Jim: They expected loyalty from you to them, didn't they?

Joe: I don't think they expected loyalty. They thought everybody hated them and they hated everybody.

Jim: So they didn't care, as long as the job was done?

Joe: Yeah.

Jim: In other words, typical business! [*laughter*]



A clutch of non-Charlton comics scripted by Joe: ***Secret Six*** #2, June-July 1968, ***Hot Wheels*** #1, Mar.-Apr. 1970; ***Die, Monster, Die [Deli Movie Classics],*** Mar. 1966; ***Mission: Impossible*** #3, Dec. 1967. Secret Six TM & © 2006 DC Comics; Hot Wheels TM & © 2006 Mattel; Die, Monster, Die © 2006 the respective copyright holder; Mission: Impossible TM & © 2006 Desilu Productions, Inc.

Joe: You know, I was a drunk. When I came to Charlton in 1955, I was drinking pretty heavily. I would get drunk in the morning, I'd have a glass of whiskey on my desk—and this was in an office—and a chaser beside it, and I'd type away. I'd go out for lunch at noon and drink a little, buy a pint of whiskey to take back to the office for the afternoon. I went by John Santangelo's desk, which was in an open area near where I'd enter to go upstairs to my office, and John Santangelo was there with Burt Levey, Pat Masulli, and one or two other senior guys, and they were talking about me. I heard my name as I went by. So I stopped and I went back, and I said, "Someone mention my name?" And John Santangelo says, "Yeah, Burt told me that you hide whiskey in your desk and you drink on the job." I said, "Well, no, I don't do that. I have the whiskey *on* the desk, I don't hide it!" [*mutual laughter*] I said, "I've got a pint here." And John looks at Burt and he says, "Burt, you want to fire this man?" He says, "No, I just want him to have his office somewhere else!" Which is understandable. They didn't want a drunk hanging around a business office. John Santangelo looked at Burt and he says, "You want to fire him for that?" And Burt says, "Well yeah, I want him to go in a different office." And John says, "Well, I've got a bottle in my desk. Do you want to fire me, too?" [*mutual laughter*] And he puts a bottle of Scotch on his desk.

Jim: Almost a kindred soul there!

Joe: I was important to John, because I was churning out this crap at a phenomenal rate for a very low rate. He needed me.

Jim: Did you get Christmas bonuses?

Joe: We got a quarter raise every year at Christmas. A quarter! After about ten years, I was up to $6.75. I was making $45,000 and $50,000 a year. Not many other writers were doing that in the '60s.

Jim: But the bosses were making a lot of money, weren't they?

Joe: They were making money on other things. The comics were losing money.

Jim: But they were making some pretty good money with the magazines, weren't they?

Joe: Not really. They had very poor organization. I was offered the job as editor before Masulli got it, and I didn't want it because I'd have to take less money. I didn't want to get pinned down, either.

Jim: Did you get along with Ron Scott?

Joe: Oh, yeah. He fancied himself as a wit, and he always tried to top one of my bon mots. I could always slam him. I began letting him have his little victories. Ron was a very stuffy guy. Undoubtedly he is a very stuffy old guy now. [*laughter*] But he was likeable enough. He was harmless. He had no force.

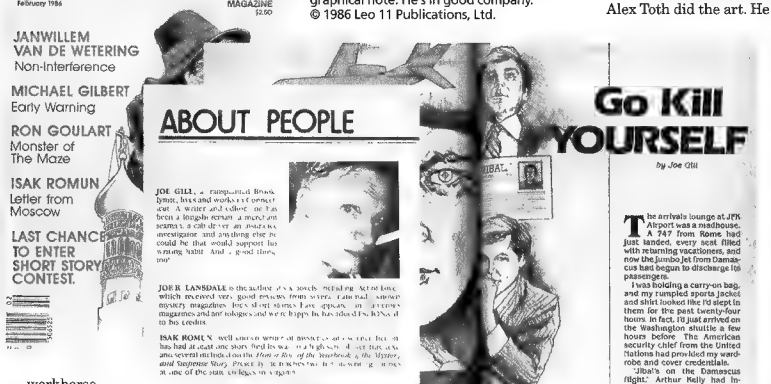
DC, DELL & BEYOND

Jim: Who got you into working for DC Comics?

Joe: Nobody got me. I just knew some of the people there. Nobody at Charlton had anything to do with it.

Jim: You worked for Dick Giordano at DC, didn't you?

Joe: Dick Giordano was the cork that kept me out of the bottle in DC. Once he became vice president there, he didn't want to be tainted by association with Charlton. When Dick had his own studio, I did a mountain of work for him. He had a contract with a French publisher for Hanna-Barbera comics, and I was pretty good with writing that kind of humor, so Dick used me on all of that work, and he thought I was great! But see, there was a stigma attached to me. I was the ubiquitous joke: I was a



Espionage #6, Feb. 1986, features a short story by Joe along with a biographical note. He's in good company. © 1986 Leo 11 Publications, Ltd.

workhorse, competent but not inspired, you know. As a matter of fact, I don't think they ever said competent! [*laughter*] I wasn't highly regarded by the comics industry. Dick asked me for new titles, for new ideas, and I gave him three great ones, and he put them on his desk, and they disappeared under the pile of later submissions, and I never got a reading. He pushed San Glanzman and me do to a monster history of World War II in comics and they didn't read any of it.

Jim: You worked for Murray Boltinoff at DC.

Joe: I didn't do much work for Boltinoff. I don't know what talent he had. I think he just survived and hung in there. I don't think he had any particular ability. He was an intelligent guy, but I don't think he contributed much. I did a little for Joe Orlando, and Dorothy Woolfolk. There was a writer, one of the aces at DC, Bob Kanigher. Oh what an arrogant bastard he was! [*laughter*] I called him up and asked him for assignments, and he said, "Yeah, come on down." So I went down, I took a copy of *Fightin' Navy*—it was just one of the things I hacked out, it wasn't sensational, it was cheaply printed and so forth—he looked at it like it had crap on the pages. He threw it down and said, "Piece of crap." And I said [*chuckles*], "You arrogant son of a bitch, who the hell are you?" He said, "Wait a minute, I'm going to give you assignments!" I said, "No, you're not!" [*laughter*]

Jim: Did you like working for Joe Orlando?

Joe: Yeah, I worked a little for Joe Orlando. He'd have me take a train from Connecticut to change "can I" to "may I." He was a very nit-picking editor, but a nice guy.

Jim: You wrote *Hot Wheels,* and you wrote for *House of Mystery*.

Joe: I didn't write a lot of *Hot Wheels,* but I wrote one story that I loved the ending of. Alex Toth did the art. He did a great job.

Jim: You also wrote *Johnny Double* and an issue of *Secret Six.*

Joe: I guess I did. It wasn't my favorite thing. I didn't like those kinds of things.

Jim: Did you feel like you had to do a better job, because DC was paying more money?

Joe: No, never. I think maybe the best writing I did was the Tarzan books I did with Glanzman. I liked all the Hanna-Barbera, and Popeye. I liked all that.

Jim: Tell me about writing for Dorothy Woolfolk. What was she like to work for?

Joe: She was great. She didn't ask me for a synopsis or anything, and she didn't find any fault when I got through. She said that I always put a good hook on the end.

Jim: Why did you stop working for DC?

Joe: Probably because Dotty left, and I didn't want to go through that bullshit with Boltinoff, and Orlando and I really didn't see eye to eye, and there weren't any editors there I could work with easily. I have to admit it.

Jim: At Dell Publications you did *Toka, Jungle King*.

Joe: I don't remember that. I worked for Dell when Don Arneson was the editor there. There were movie adaptations, westerns.

Jim: You did *Mission: Impossible*. And you did one called *T.H.E. Cat*.

Joe: Oh, yeah. I didn't like that character.

Jim: But here again, you didn't do a whole lot of work for them. Why was that?

Joe: They were offering me tough jobs. Not tough, but ones I didn't want to write. They wanted me to do *Boris Karloff,* and they wanted me to do some other thing about midnight, you know, so I said, "Why don't you give me something easy?" They

said, "Like what?" I said, "Well, you've got Tarzan. The Tarzan I did at Charlton was a lot better than yours." And he said, "Yeah, but you must've done a special job. You got paid for it." I said, "No, I got the same rate." And it *was* better than theirs.

Old friends—bookends. "This is Prof. Gill with his protege. He didn't write good comics in 1946 so he had to be content with Mike Hammer best-sellers." Photo courtesy of and © 2006 Joe Gill.

BASEBALL STORIES

Jim: You're a baseball fan. Did you ever watch the Brooklyn Dodgers play?

Joe: I went to those games a lot. I lived in Flatbush, about three-quarters of a mile away from the field. I took a cab down. I think the games were at 3:00 in the afternoon at that time. I'd take a cab down at about ten to three, and watch the game for, I think, $1.55.

Jim: What was it like to watch the Dodgers? What was Ebbets Field like?

Joe: It was about the size of Fenway Park. It didn't have very deep stands. If you were in the last seat of the first row, or the first section, or first deck, you weren't very far from the field. If you were standing, which I would do when I first got there, stand behind the last row, you were still pretty close to first base. And then when you see an empty seat, you have to give the usher a buck or two and sit down in a box seat. But I'm a Mets fan now.

Jim: I should've guessed that. How did you feel when Jackie Robinson came up to the major leagues?

Joe: It felt good. He was a good ballplayer. Everybody knew that black ballplayers were very good.

Jim: The people in Brooklyn supported him, didn't they?

Joe: Sure they did. If you were a baseball fan, you didn't give a damn about black or white.

Jim: How old were you when you went to your first Major League game?

Joe: About 13, I guess. I moved to Brooklyn from Scranton about 1932.

Jim: Did you ever see Babe Ruth or Lou Gehrig play?

Joe: I shook hands with Babe Ruth in 1927. There was a Major League catcher named Steve O'Neill—he was from Minooka [Pennsylvania], a small town I lived in. And Babe Ruth was with O'Neill in a big four-door touring sedan. It didn't have windows in the doors. But there were four people there with O'Neill, having a few beers, and some lady, who had a friend who was the principal of the school. O'Neill called him up and said, "Guess who I've got up here? Babe Ruth." And the principal says, "Bring him down, bring him down!" So O'Neill drove Ruth and two other ballplayers down to the school, parked outside the school, on a dirt road, and some lady declared a recess and all the kids in the school went out and stood around the car, looking at Babe Ruth. Nobody was saying anything. And my brother wasn't a baseball fan at all, he once asked me if the Giants were a baseball team, okay? Nobody was saying anything, and Ray says, "Mr. Ruth, can I shake your hand?" He says, "Sure, kid," and Ray shook his hand. And I stood up, and I shook his hand. That's my one claim to fame, I shook hands with Babe Ruth. One of the greatest guys they had He had a wonderful attitude. He enjoyed his career.

"This is me attending religious services. The kid in the background is my nephew Al, a lousy pool player. Photo taken by an unsuccessful talent scout." Photo courtesy of and © 2006 Joe Gill.

Jim: So you were more of a National League fan?

Joe: Until I moved to Brooklyn, I wasn't any kind of a fan at all. I was a National League fan, yeah.

Jim: You don't write any more. Do you miss it?

Joe: Well, to tell you the truth, I enjoyed writing a lot of comics. I enjoyed writing the animated books. I'd sit there laughing to myself when I wrote something funny. I liked writing. I write letters to Spillane. I enjoy typing, to that extent. I used to be a very fast typist, but due to lack of practice, I've slowed down a lot. I play pool every morning, and poker every afternoon. [*laughter*]

Jim: Do you win?

Joe: Oh, yeah.

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The *Positively Charged Nucleus* of Captain Atom

by Mark Burbey

WITHOUT EITHER JOE GILL OR STEVE DITKO, and most certainly without the cocreated projects produced by these two remarkable talents, Charlton Comics would have been a very different company. It's probably both fair and objective to say that Ditko's contribution was more significant, as he could transform even the dullest script into a visual feast and an entertaining read. Gill, conversely, delivered a consistency of quality and tone, and by mere virtue of having to churn out so many pages over so many years, he wrote more entertaining stories than just about any other writer in the history of comics.

Their hallmark creation is arguably Captain Atom, a science-fiction superhero who enjoyed two shots at success while at Charlton: a nine-issue run in *Space Adventures* #33 through #42 (Mar. 1960–Oct. 1961) and a two-year stint in *Captain Atom* #78 through #89 (Dec. 1965–Dec. 1967). Captain Atom would make a last-gasp appearance in Charlton's amateur-pro tryout title, *Charlton Bullseye* #7 (written by Benjamin Smith and drawn by Dan Reed), published in 1982, but we'll discuss later why this character hasn't made a satisfactory transition into the hands of other creators.

Captain Atom's origin story in *Space Adventures* #33 described "Captain Adam" as an "Air Force career man who knew more about rocketry, missiles, and the universe than any man alive . . . a specialist of the missile age, a trained, dedicated soldier who was a physics prodigy at [the age of] eight!" It's three minutes to blastoff at Cape Canaveral, and this very special man is inside an Atlas missile that's armed with an atomic warhead. Realistically, everyone would have been cleared from the area well before three minutes before liftoff, especially an Air Force career man who knew more about the universe than any man alive. But instead of being in the control room with everyone else, he's inside the rocket "making final last second adjustments." He drops his screwdriver. He's got to get it out. But it's too late for him or the screwdriver. It "takes a full minute to squirm out of" the missile, but the final seconds are ticking away and Captain Adam realizes he's "going for a long, fast ride." Captain Adam's friend Sergeant Gunner and General Eining resign themselves to the former prodigy's fate as they watch the missile soar toward the ionosphere, preset to explode in space.

"At the instant of fission, Captain Adam was not flesh, bone and blood at all . . . the desiccated molecular skeleton was intact but a change . . . had taken place!" Moments later, the General and Gunner hear Adam's voice calling them to the launching pad, where they are stunned to find an alive but miraculously altered Captain Adam. He's dangerously radioactive, but he's been imbued with amazing powers. He can fly at speeds up to 20,000 mph, he's able to disintegrate and reintegrate at will, he can survive in the vacuum of space, and he has the ability to hurl "fiery rays great enough to melt any metal known to man."

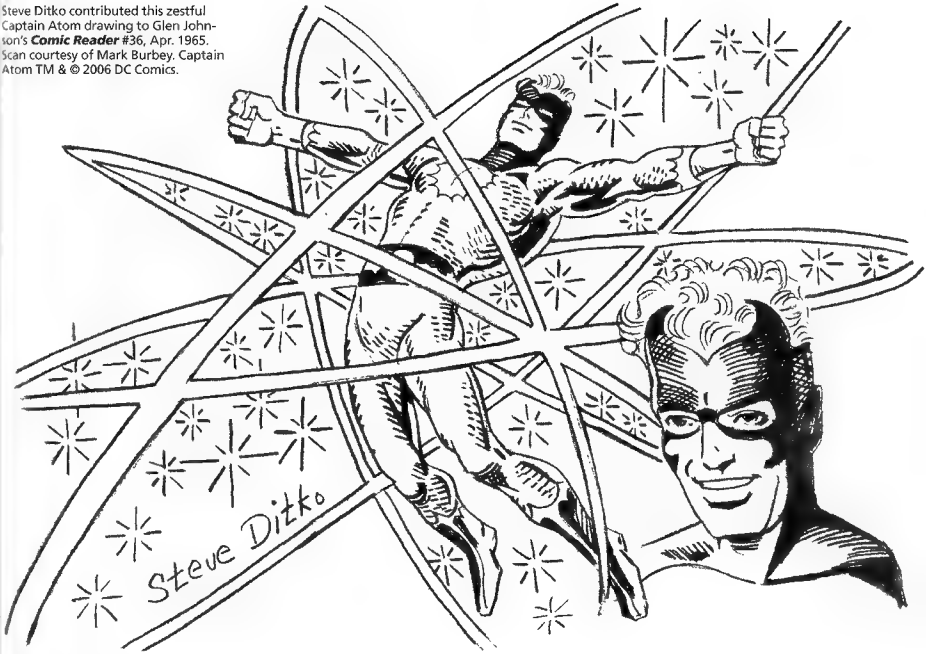
It might be a bit hyperbolic to say that Gill was the proton and Ditko the neutron in the creation of Captain Atom, but the metaphor is apt, even if their involvement was just another day at the office. In a telephone interview, Joe Gill related how editor Pat Masulli gave him his first assignment of the day. "I just got there one morning and they needed something in the superhero area," Gill said. "I went out and sat down at my desk and knocked it out. It took me about an hour, or less."

With the Marvel Age of Comics waiting in the wings, and DC Comics dominating the market with a line of classic superheroes they had published since the 1940s, Charlton may have felt the time was right to dip their baby toe into the shallow end of the pool. Charlton, however, had very little experience with superheroes before Captain Atom's debut in *Space Adventures* #33 in 1960. Focusing instead on a diverse line of crime, horror, science fiction, mystery, war, adventure, romance, western, and humor comics, Charlton's superhero output had been limited to a handful of titles: *Yellowjacket* (1944–46), *Blue Beetle* (1954–55), *Mr. Muscles* (1956), *Nature Boy* (1956–57), and maybe *Atom the Cat* (1957–59), *Atomic Rabbit / Atomic Bunny* (1955–59), and *Atomic Mouse* (1953–63)—the latter three of which were funny animal comics.

As a company that followed trends instead of creating them, Charlton was surely aware that science fiction was riding a crest of popularity in the late '50s. Hollywood was having fun with the genre and releasing films like *Missile to the Moon* (1958), *The Amazing Transparent Man* (1959), and *First Spaceship on Venus* (1960). DC Comics was testing the waters with characters like Space Ranger and Adam Strange, both of whom first appeared in *Showcase* in the latter part of 1958 before graduating to slots in *Tales of the Unexpected* and *Mystery in Space*. With a history of publishing comics in just about every genre *except* superheroes, it's understandable that Charlton safely tested Captain Atom in a science fiction title they could already depend on for a certain number of sales.

Pat Masulli has often been misidentified as the creator of Captain Atom (likely due to the credit in *Captain Atom* #79), but Gill said, "Pat Masulli didn't have a damn thing to do with it! He never created anything." When asked why Masulli would take credit, Gill said, "Because he was that kind of a jerk—may he rest in peace. He didn't create anything. He *couldn't* create anything. He was the editor. That was it. He was a letterer before he became an editor. He had no creative talent whatsoever."

JOE GILL BEGAN WRITING FOR COMICS in the mid-'40s after being introduced to the field by friend and novelist Mickey Spillane. By 1959, Gill had written comics for St. John, Timely, Atlas, DC, and other publishers, and was now happily ensconced in a staff position at Charlton as head writer. Despite the miserly wage of $4 a page, Gill preferred the security of a staff posi-



Steve Ditko contributed this zestful Captain Atom drawing to Glen Johnson's ***Comic Reader*** #36, Apr. 1965. Scan courtesy of Mark Burbey. Captain Atom TM & © 2006 DC Comics.

tion over the precariousness of freelance work. In an article by Jon B. Cooke and Christopher Irving published in *Comic Book Artist* #9 (Aug. 2000), Gill said, "I didn't like pounding the pavement going from publisher to publisher. I didn't like kissing ass to editors, and I didn't like the uncertainty of whether or not I'd have assignments."

Gill is legendary for writing in excess of 100 pages of comics a week. "I began working with Al Fago," Gill said in our conversation, "and he was paying $4 a page, and he guaranteed me 25 pages a week. I was working at some kind of crappy job and I wanted to get out of Brooklyn anyway, so I took it, but the first week I went over the 25 pages and I kept going up. The most I would get assigned a week from Charlton was, I think, 120 pages. They'd give me a shopping list on Friday of what they needed in the following week, and I delivered by Thursday or Friday morning.

"I wrote very fast," Gill explained. "I made a lot of mistakes. I don't mean spelling and so forth. I'd quite often forget the names of the principals in the stories between the first page and the last, because I never reread anything I had written. But I didn't only do comics. I wrote thousands of true confession stories. I wrote entire magazines; I'd get paid for the package. I did a couple of those a month."

By 1955, Gill's ability to crank out so many pages was earning him a respectable living, even by today's standards, but that would change overnight when heavy rains from Hurricane Diane in August of that year caused a dam to burst and the Charlton publishing plant was submerged under 18 feet of water. When "we had the flood in 1955, the presses had to be dug out of silt and mud," Gill said. Charlton received millions of dollars in flood relief, yet "[Charlton publisher John] Santangelo had a meeting with all of his artists and writers and he said that he could resume publishing but that we'd have to work for half our rate. That's where I really geared up to turn out a lot of pages."

As for what this did to company morale, Gill said, "We didn't know how to spell it or pronounce it. We had none." At the end of his tenure at Charlton, Gill "was getting about $6.75 a page. I got a quarter raise each year, from $2 a page after the flood." As a result, Gill was being paid little more than $3 a page when he began writing Captain Atom.

Ditko had been inspired to draw comics by the work of Batman illustrator Jerry Robinson and Will Eisner's *The Spirit*, and in 1950 he studied at the Cartoonist and Illustrators School in New York under Robinson's tutelage. After Ditko entered the industry in 1953, he freelanced for Gilmore, Prize, Ajax/Farrell, Harvey, Timor, St. John, and Atlas. Most of his work in 1954 was for Charlton on titles such as *Crime and Justice, Racket Squad in Action, Space Adventures, Strange Suspense Stories, The Thing!*, and *This Magazine Is Haunted*. In 1955, Ditko did virtually no work at all, possibly due to illness, returning in 1956 to produce approximately 66 pages, almost exclusively for Atlas. The spring of 1957 is notable for the infamous implosion at Atlas, leaving scores of artists wanting for work. Ditko, however, landed quite comfortably at Charlton, producing nearly a thousand pages and 32 covers over a two-year period for *Cheyenne*

The Captain's debut in ***Space Adventures*** #33, Mar. 1960. Captain Atom TM & © 2006 DC Comics.

Kid, Fightin' Army, Mysteries of Unexplored Worlds, Out of This World, Tales of the Mysterious Traveler, Texas Rangers in Action, Unusual Tales, Black Fury, Rocky Lane's Black Jack, Outer Space, Robin Hood and His Merry Men, and others. It wasn't until 1959 that Ditko started working for Atlas again, balancing his output between that company and Charlton.

When asked how Ditko came to be assigned the first Captain Atom script, Gill said, "He was just an artist who was in the office, and he was assigned to draw the script." This is no doubt how things worked at Charlton at this time, but when viewed within the context of Ditko's chronology, it was only natural that he be assigned the job. By 1959, Steve Ditko had already produced more than 1,500 pages of comics and was a regular contributor to *Space Adventures*. He had carved out an early niche as a master of atmospheric and stylish comics in a variety of genres at a variety of publishers, and Captain Atom gave him his first opportunity to draw a superhero. Having studied and admired the work of Robinson, Eisner, and others (notably Joe Kubert), he was more than prepared to tackle the superhero genre. From the origin story in *Space Adventures* #33, the Captain Atom series seamlessly melded the science-fiction genre in which Ditko had already displayed such prowess with that of a unique brand of superheroics. Regardless of the workmanlike nature of the assignment, Gill was pleased with the outcome, saying, "Ditko created the costumes, Ditko brought the characters to life, and he did a wonderful job. He was a good artist, and he was an artist who always did his best no matter what rate he was being paid for the page, and so did I. Both of us, as I said, were faced with the fact that we had to do a lot to make a decent living."

Entering the superhero market with little fanfare may well have been the character's saving grace. If Gill had been asked to create a superhero that would be appearing in its own title, the result may have been another Mr. Muscles or pre-Ditko Blue Beetle. By crossbreeding a space-age superhero with short-form fantasy/sci-fi stories, Gill and Ditko succeeded in creating stories that used the best of both genres. Gill's Captain Atom scripts might seem a bit repetitive when read all at once in DC's recent *Action Heroes Archive,* Vol. 1, but when read in smaller doses, as readers did in 1960, they offered a creative alternative to DC's gimmick-laden stories in which characters were regularly turned into witches, aliens, and, most certainly, gorillas. Gill's canvas was America during the Cold War, which provided Captain Atom with a convenient and realistic enemy-villain. Given that the stories averaged between five and seven pages in length, he didn't need to worry about developing more than a handful of characters or deal with keeping Captain Atom's identity a secret. Captain Atom was more of a top-secret weapon that only a select few knew about, including the president. In maintaining a tone of realism, Ditko depicted Captain Atom meeting with President Eisenhower instead of the fictitious or standing-in-silhouette figure normally used to portray presidents in comics.

In the first series of stories (1960–61), Captain Atom generally divided his time between Cape Canaveral and outer space, with occasional jaunts to the White House. Apart from sporadic references to the Iron Curtain, the Soviet Union and the various European rogue nations were seldom directly named as the enemies at hand, but Ditko's graphics deftly telegraphed their identities. Many of the stories were rooted in our fears of atomic annihilation, and Captain Atom warded off World War III and nuclear missile attacks on a regular basis. In the second Captain Atom story (*Space Adventures* #34), he saved the life of a Russian cosmonaut who had lost consciousness in his capsule. It's doubtful that anyone involved with Captain Atom intentionally gave these stories a propagandistic slant. This was simply the tone of the times, in comic books as in every other form of popular entertainment, and this story in particular was a pleasant change from good versus evil while conversely giving a nod to the space race.

WHEN CAPTAIN ATOM WASN'T DEALING WITH emergencies in space or threats from foreign powers, he was dealing with alien invasions and celestial mysteries. In our interview, Gill was surprised to hear that these stories averaged between five and seven pages, saying, "Not much can happen in five pages." With a gift for literary foreshortening, however, Gill managed to convey a wealth of story in a modicum of pages. In six pages, he told a satisfying tale of sabotage and subterfuge in which Captain Atom again prevents Armageddon ("The Crisis," *Space Adventures* #40). With only five pages, he told a tale of deceit and duplicity behind the Iron Curtain with Captain Atom appearing in only five panels ("The Ageless Weapon," *Space Adventures* #39). Stories like these still stand as lessons in economical storytelling for modern comics writers.

Providing a break from the Cold War action was a fairly poignant tale called "The Little Wanderer" (*Space Adventures* #35). In this story, beautifully drawn and inventively written as part dream, part mystery, Sergeant Gunner's young son appears to be having lucid dreams that take him to the dark side of the moon and out among the stars. The boy never leaves his bed,

but he can't be stirred. In searching for him, Captain Atom actually finds him joyfully riding a bizarre space-bird, a creature that he finds to be all too tangible. The story ends with the boy waking in his bed with the belief that what happened was real. Gill's script is built around a fairly underdeveloped premise, yet it's touching enough to satisfy the reader with the fanciful mystery that lingers afterward. Ditko's art, however, is what makes the piece truly work. As would later be evidenced in *Amazing Spider-Man,* Mr. A stories, and elsewhere, Ditko depicts these characters as icons of emotion and virtue. With just a couple of panels Ditko evokes empathy for Sergeant Gunner and his wife as they worry about their son, and with a minimum of peripheral detail he creates the notion of a cozy home in midcentury America.

Gill and Ditko would create a similar story in *Space Adventures* #40, titled "The Boy and the Stars," wherein a small boy is dying from what doctors think is gamma-ray poisoning, "but a different type . . . filtering down from the stars." With a modicum of exposition, Captain Adam visits the boy in the hospital, changes into Captain Atom, and takes the boy on his back to "a lovely star which emanates a ray that I have found useful." How the boy can breathe in space isn't addressed, but the empathetic interactions between Captain Atom, the boy, and the boy's father deftly sweep that technicality aside.

What lived at the heart—or the nucleus—of the first series of Captain Atom stories was the nobility of the hero's earthly persona of Captain Adam. We already knew that he was a military man and a brilliant man of science, but we quickly came to know him as a man of compassion—a man dedicated to doing what was right and beneficial to others. Equally admirable was Sergeant Gunner, who stood by Captain Adam as friend and confidante while running interference. It's these human qualities of right and wrong that are so endemic in Ditko's work throughout his career, and that make these stories and the character of Captain Atom so inseparable from the artist that gave them life.

How much Ditko contributed to the series conceptually is always the big question. "We had very little conversation about it," Gill said. "He wasn't involved in doing the stories, but I will say this—if Ditko changed anything in my scripts, it would have been for the better. Any artist I worked with was free to make changes or deletions. As a matter of fact, most artists liked to work with me because I didn't overdescribe the action in any panel. I didn't ask for anything that was impossible to draw. Sometimes a writer would put in an army and a couple elephants and a camel, you know, and give the artist a hard time. You had to bear in mind what they had to do."

TICS GIVE YOU MORE!
AT THE INSTANT OF FISSION, CAPTAIN ADAM WAS NOT FLESH, BONE AND BLOOD AT ALL . . . THE DESICCATED MOLECULAR SKELETON WAS INTACT BUT A CHANGE, NEVER KNOWN TO MAN, HAD TAKEN PLACE!
TM & © 2006 DC Comics.

Ditko's art in these early stories is simply amazing—perhaps some of his best—with a weight, substance, texture, depth, and dimensionality so organic and tactile that it transcends mere images on paper. The inky black of space, the furrowed topography of satellites and planets, the peerless depictions of reptilian aliens, and the variety of dynamic camera angles were all uniquely Ditko. His portrayals of characters and their nationalities, personalities, and temperaments were adroitly realized and exceedingly expressive with but a few strokes, down to the most inconsequential walk-on character. And anyone who thinks Ditko can't draw beautiful women needs to check out the Venusian dolls in "A Victory for Venus" (*Space Adventures* #37) and "The Silver Lady from Venus" (*Space Adventures* #42). There's definitely something about those gals from Venus.

Ditko's extraordinary imagination has to be viewed as bordering on genius, and his gift for creating compelling comics is in stark contrast to three Captain Atom stories that were penciled and inked by Rocke Mastroserio (*Space Adventures* #39 and #42). Mastroserio would ink Ditko's pencils on a regular basis when Captain Atom was revived in his own title in 1965, but here readers were offered a glimpse at his solo work. Ditko fans who only grudgingly accept Mastroserio's inks in the later series would surely not be impressed by these earlier efforts, which barely rise above generically competent. In fact, one would be hard pressed to identify the work as being by the same artist. His inks over Ditko in 1965's *Captain Atom* are relatively tight with a thin pen line, whereas he seems to have used a brush when inking his own work. It's doubtful that he shared Ditko's dedication to excellence regardless of the page rate, given that in the first of the three stories ("Peace Envoy," *Space Adventures* #39), he draws Captain Atom's costume incorrectly and it even seems to be ill fitting.

THE PERIOD OF 1961–62 was an extremely active one for Ditko, wherein he produced well over a thousand pages and more than 30 covers for Charlton and Atlas/Marvel, including the first Spider-Man story in *Amazing Fantasy* #15 (Aug. 1962). Captain Atom appeared in only nine issues of *Space Adventures*. With the final stories running in issue #42 (Oct. 1961) after none in #41, the character disappeared as quietly as he'd arrived. Gill has no memory of why the feature was discontinued, but one can only assume that sales didn't meet expectations. Charlton, however, continued to publish

Space Adventures through issue #59 (Nov. 1964). A 60th issue appeared in late 1967, and a brief second series of the title ran in 1968 and '69.

A YEAR AFTER CAPTAIN ATOM FADED into the molecular fabric of comic book history (albeit temporarily), Gold Key Comics published *Doctor Solar*, featuring a character that was similarly disintegrated in a nuclear accident and had managed to reincorporate himself. Created by Paul S. Newman (a comics writer as prolific as Joe Gill, if not more so) and editor Matt Murphy, Doctor Philip Solar had gained the ability to manipulate atomic particles, and in his crime-fighting guise was known as "The Man of the Atom." Gold Key produced 28 quarterly issues of the title between October 1962 and April 1969 (not including a brief revival by Whitman Comics in 1981). Various writers and artists would work on the series, and with a total of 31 issues to its credit, it can be argued that *Doctor Solar* was more successful than Charlton's atomic hero. Whether Newman and Murphy had been inspired by Captain Atom, or had created Doctor Solar independently, is open to conjecture.

Whatever the case, Captain Atom and Doctor Solar would eventually share rack space when Charlton, motivated by the wave of superhero success at Marvel, began to reprint the original stories in *Strange Suspense Stories* #75 (June 1965). With Masulli still editing, they ran reprints for three issues before finally changing the title to *Captain Atom* with issue #78 (Dec. 1965), in which Gill and Ditko began creating new adventures.

It's interesting to note that several months prior, Joe Gill and Dick Giordano cocreated *Nukla*, a title for Dell Comics featuring a character that, like Doctor Solar, was similar to Captain Atom in that he, too, was vaporized in an explosion only to find himself rematerialized and bestowed with nuclear powers. Gill scripted the series with Dick Giordano and Sal Trapani providing the visual designs and art for the first three issues. The fourth and final issue, however, was penciled by Ditko with inks by Trapani, bringing the similarities to Captain Atom even closer to home. The brief lifespan of *Nukla* (Oct. 1965–Sept. 1966) was typical of the minor superhero titles produced by Dell during this period.

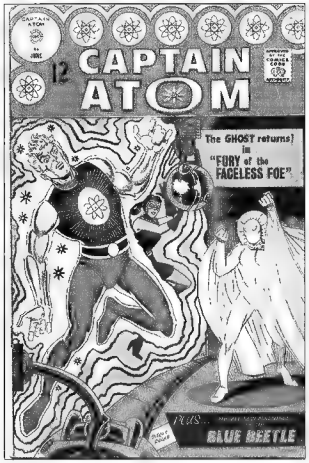
A fine Ditko panel from "Test-Pilot's Nightmare," in ***Space Adventures*** #39, Apr 1961. Captain Atom TM & © 2006 DC Comics.

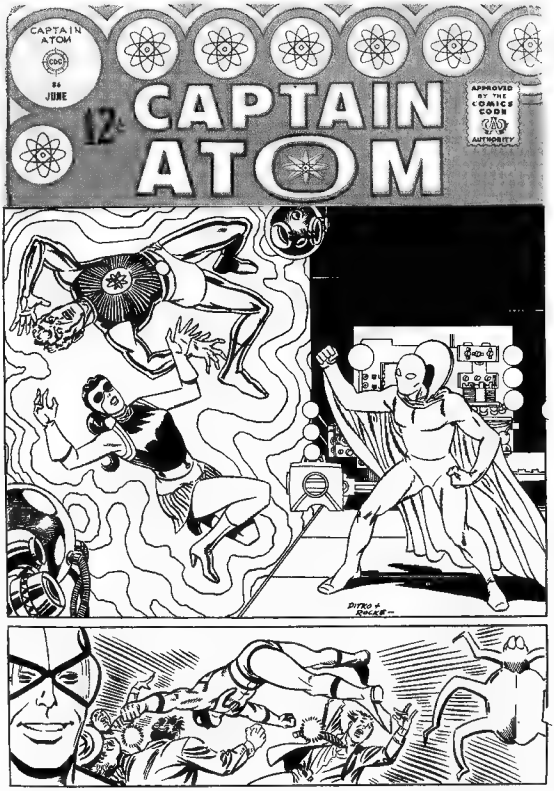
Ditko was in the final phase of his Silver Age career at Marvel, creating some of his finest work on Spider-Man and Dr. Strange. *Captain Atom* #78 was cover-dated the same month (Dec. 1965) as *Amazing Spider-Man* #31 and *Strange Tales* #139. This should be explanation enough for anyone who asks why Ditko didn't ink his own pencils on the revived *Captain Atom*. By the summer of 1966, Ditko had left Marvel for good, finding work instead at Warren, Tower Comics, ACG, Dell, and DC, in addition to contributing to numerous fanzines. His main body of work for Charlton in 1967 was *Blue Beetle* #1–4 and the remaining issues of *Captain Atom*.

Instead of the five-to-seven-page stories that comprised the original Captain Atom series, Gill and Ditko were now creating book-length, 20-page features. There was now room for additional characterization and suggestions of romance for the all-work-and-no-play Captain Adam. Instead of addressing Cold War threats of obliteration and sci-fi mysteries set against the stars, Captain Atom now assumed the role of Air Force man turned superhero. His origin and personality were the same, but he was now facing super-villains from space and earthbound foes such as Dr. Spectro and the Ghost. Also added to the cast was pushy newspaper reporter Abby Ladd who, not unlike Spider-Man's J. Jonah Jameson, was determined to discover his secret identity and expose him as "just another glory seeker." Predictably, she had an opposite reaction to "the handsome Captain Adam here! He does his duty but no one ever reads about it." Fortunately, her walk-ons were kept to a minimum.

In keeping with superhero comics of the Silver Age, fight scenes became more prevalent and prolonged, so much so that one occasionally pined for the more concentrated five-to-seven-page doses of the original series. In reaction to Abby Ladd's efforts to expose Captain Atom's identity, the character became increasingly concerned with keeping it a secret. The new costume he receives in *Captain Atom* #84 is a metal liquid sprayed onto his body to protect others from his radioactivity. His costume remains invisible until he "powers up" and his appearance changes, no longer necessitating wearing a mask.

The distribution of credits in *Captain Atom* #78 through #81 is a little fuzzy. The credits in #78 named Gill as writer, Ditko as penciler, and Mastroserio as





The first, rejected cover to ***Captain Atom*** #86, June 1967, shown above superimposed below the printed masthead. Top portion penciled by Steve Ditko and inked by Rocke Mastroserio; bottom panel penciled and inked by Steve Ditko. The art previously appeared only in the fanzine ***Gremlin*** #2, Dec. 1970; image courtesy of publisher Gary Brown. ***Above left,*** the final, published version. Captain Atom TM & © 2006 DC Comics.

inker. Writing credits in issue #79, however, are shared by Gill and Ditko, suggesting that Ditko contributed to the plot and character creation. Gill remembers writing only full scripts, but characters like Dr. Spectro and Rodent have Ditko written all over them, in both appearance and demeanor. As a medical man who is laughed out of his profession after advancing theories of curing illness and affecting moods with beams of color, Dr. Spectro becomes evil after receiving an overwhelming dose of his own mood-changing rays—archetypal Ditko. *Captain Atom* #80 and #81 have no writing credits, but the plotting appears to be by Ditko, and Gill is generally accepted to be the writer.

Captain Atom #81 was Joe Gill's final issue, as he moved on to write *Fightin' Five, Cheyenne Kid, Judomaster, Peacemaker, War Heroes, Hercules, Wyatt Earp Frontier Marshal, Billy the Kid, Jungle Jim*, and many others, including countless stories for Charlton's ghost and romance comics.

In *Captain Atom* #82, a new writer's name appears in the credits: Dave Kaler, a man perhaps best remembered as the organizer of the New York Comic Book Convention in the summer of 1965. The issue also introduces a new heroine (Nightshade) and a new recurring villain (the Ghost), both designed (and undoubtedly created) by Ditko. Though not seen again until *Captain Atom* #85, Nightshade was Eve Eden—daughter of a U.S. senator—and in addition to occasionally fighting side by side with Captain Atom, there were suggestions of a romance between them. We eventually learn that her mother was from another dimension where they possess the ability to assume the form of two-dimensional shadows, hence the heroine's rather campy nickname—"the Darling of Darkness."

Issue #83 finally credits the story as being "plotted and penciled" by Ditko, with Kaler scripting and Mastroserio inking. Captain Atom receives a new costume in #84, and Kaler receives sole writing credit. By this time, *Captain Atom* was part of new editor Dick Giordano's "Action-Hero" line of comics. Giordano's desire for his line of heroes was that they be more action-oriented and less dependent on super powers. Characters like Blue Beetle, Peacemaker, Judomaster, and Thunderbolt fit the bill perfectly. But Captain Atom, without his powers, was just an Air Force man. The solution was to limit his powers by making them exhaustible; the more he used them, the weaker he became.

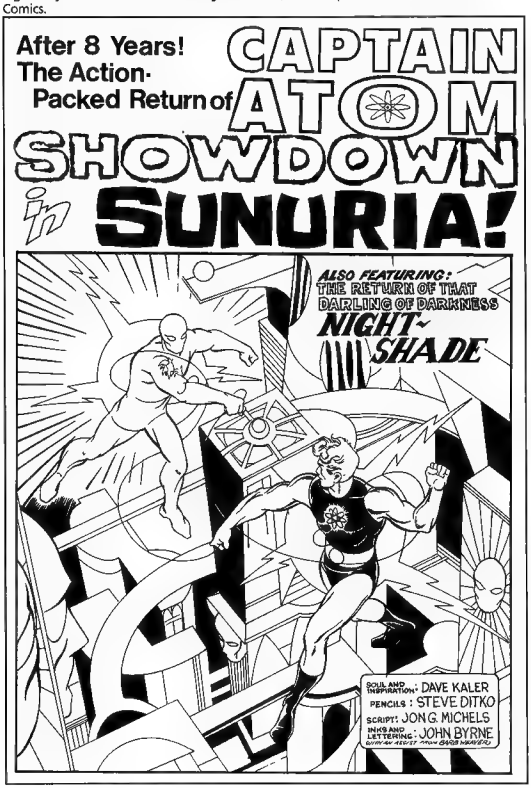
Kaler received sole writing credit in *Captain Atom* #84, but according to Giordano, "From the time of the Captain Atom costume change to the end of Ditko's run on the title, Steve plotted them *all* on the art boards. Either we gave those to Joe Gill to dialogue or Steve's apparent shyness for taking writing credit led us to credit Joe in honor of his having written the book up to that time. Steve plotted or wrote all the features he drew for the Action-Hero line including the Blue Beetle and the Question. Steve also created most, if not all, of the villains and at least the visuals to Nightshade. It is customary to give cocreator credits when the artist who designs the visuals and the writer that cre-

ates her origin and puts words in her mouth, are not the same person."

Further confusing matters, Kaler was credited as "creator and writer" when he teamed up with Jim Aparo on a Nightshade backup feature in *Captain Atom* #87–89. "I can't explain the credits on the Aparo backup Nightshade stories," Giordano said, "unless they were produced after I left Charlton in '67 and Sal Gentile, my replacement wasn't aware and let the credit that Dave wrote, stand." In that same year, Kaler also wrote scripts for *Charlton Premiere, Secret Agent, Ghostly Tales*, and *The Many Ghosts of Doctor Graves*. Despite every effort, however, Kaler couldn't be found for the purposes of this article.

With *Captain Atom* #88, Frank McLaughlin replaced Mastroserio as inker. Better suited to inking his own pencils on *Judomaster*, McLaughlin's inks over Ditko were flat and unremarkable. Without delving into a treatise on inking, it's enough to say that Ditko's art has long presented inkers with certain challenges. If Ditko knew that someone else would be inking his work, he'd provide tighter pencils than he would for himself, but it still took the right inker to keep Ditko looking like Ditko. Despite his lackluster solo work, Mastroserio was such an inker and he was able to maintain the integrity of Ditko's style. McLaughlin, unfortunately, only made Ditko's pages look lifeless and uninspired.

What would have been ***Captain Atom*** #90, early 1968, was finally published in the legendary fanzine ***Charlton Bullseye*** #1 and 2, 1975. Captain Atom TM & © 2006 DC Comics.



AT THE CLOSE OF THE FINAL ISSUE (#89), the Ghost was gearing up for a showdown with Captain Atom. Ditko had penciled issue #90 in 1968, but the story would not see the light of day until 1975, when it turned up as a two-parter in the first two issues of *Charlton Bullseye* (the fanzine published by Bob Layton and Roger Stern). In 1974, Layton and company (the CPL Gang) published the *Charlton Portfolio* after a windfall of unpublished material fell into their laps, including Ditko's ready-to-print *Blue Beetle* #6. In an e-mail exchange, associate editor Roger Stern said, "After we produced the *Charlton Portfolio*, Bob visited the Charlton offices in Derby, where they were enthusiastic about having us produce a fanzine . . . which became the *Charlton Bullseye*. Charlton then turned over a good bit of material that they had lying around in inventory, including Steve Ditko's penciled pages for that Captain Atom story."

Stern remembers that the "penciled art was fairly tight, which wasn't too surprising, as the Captain Atom stories of the mid-to-late '60s were usually inked by another artist. The only plot we had to work from was the raw art—but of course Ditko's storytelling made everything pretty darn clear as to what was going on." As for how John Byrne came to ink them, Stern said, "He was available and willing. I believe there were some young already-established professionals who had expressed an interest in the job, just for the experience of inking Ditko's pencils . . . some writers, too. But it turned out that none of them were going to be able to work on the story when we needed them to. John inked and lettered the story right on the boards, which was, after all, the customary way of doing things in those days. Unfortunately, we don't have any photocopies of the pencils, as copy centers were not yet common in early 1970s Indiana."

Jon G. Michels was credited with scripting the first half of the story, but "that was me," Stern said, "with a little input from Bob and John, as I recall. When Bob asked me to script the story, I first thought he had to be kidding. I don't remember how long it took me to write that first half, but I was scared silly the whole time. I insisted on using a pen name so that if I screwed up royally, I wouldn't have to worry about having a horde of Ditko fans come looking for me. By the time I finished the second half, I was having so much fun that I decided to use my own name. Looking back, I suppose the script isn't too bad, but it's a long way from great. I still wish that I could go back and rewrite it."

It's interesting to note that the letters page in *Charlton Bullseye* #5 (July–Sept. 1976) featured what may be Dave Kaler's last appearance in print, in which he stated, "I've been getting *Bullseye* from various sources now for over a year and have received a few surprises. I enjoyed seeing the Captain Atom story but was surprised to see that you did not use my ending for that story. What happened to

Cover detail from ***Space Adventures*** #37, Dec. 1960. Captain Atom TM & © 2006 DC Comics.

the script and artwork, as Dick Giordano told me that it had all been completed, and here I find someone else finished the story. I probably have my copy of that script stored away in Brooklyn and am going to check for it so that I can see how the new writer did on it." He went on to say that he had plots for stories he'd hoped to sell to Charlton had they not dropped their superhero line.

It is difficult to clarify who said what and what they were referring to after almost 40 years, but in a recent e-mail, Dick Giordano wrote, "This is the first time I've heard that an inventory Captain Atom story was published by *Charlton Bullseye.* My guess would be that the original was a continued story and the ending was changed to make it stand alone. But I'm not even sure of that! I left Charlton because of the failure of the Action-Hero line for which I blamed Charlton's lack of promotion, advertising and interest. At the time that I left, I believe that the Action-Hero line, including *Captain Atom,* had not been canceled yet. I have no recollection of this particular Captain Atom story and I can't recall if I told David that it was finished or that the pencils were finished."

ANOTHER SEVEN YEARS WOULD PASS before Captain Atom resurfaced in the aforementioned Charlton tryout title, *Charlton Bullseye* #7 (1982), and *Americomics Special* #1, published by AC Comics in 1983. That same year, DC editor Dick Giordano engineered a deal by which DC Comics acquired the full lot of Charlton heroes. Initially, thought was given to including them in Alan Moore's *Watchmen* epic. His original proposal was built around them, and in an interview in *Comic Book Artist* #9, Moore said that Giordano "liked the proposal, but he didn't really want to use the Charlton characters, because the proposal would've left a lot of them in bad shape, and DC couldn't have really used them again after what we were going to do to them without detracting from the power of what it was that we were planning." Moore and artist Dave Gibbons then "started to reshape the concept—using the Charlton characters as the jumping-off point, because those were the ones we submitted to Dick—and that's what the plot involved. We started to mutate the characters, and I began to realize the changes allowed me so much more freedom." This is how Captain Atom, Blue Beetle, and the Question evolved into Dr. Manhattan, Nite-Owl, and Rorschach.

When DC finally did begin to use the Charlton characters, however, it became painfully clear, at least to die-hard Charlton fans, that what makes these characters memorable and what continues to imbue them with a certain brand of nostalgia

is that they were Charlton characters, created by Charlton writers and artists, printed on Charlton paper on Charlton's aging presses. Even more vital, particularly in the case of Captain Atom, Blue Beetle, and the Question, is that they were inextricably linked with Steve Ditko. With the exception of Spider-Man and Dr. Strange, characters that debuted under Ditko's unique style and approach have seldom translated well into another artist's vocabulary. Many artists can do excellent interpretations of Batman, Superman, the Hulk, Thor—whomever—but Ditko's style is so idiosyncratic and the substance of his characters is such an extension of his personality and beliefs that it borders on creative trespassing for anyone besides Ditko to illustrate their exploits. This is particularly true of the Question, who Ditko created not so much to entertain but to express his own beliefs in the philosophy of Objectivism. Fully aware of who his audience was, however, Ditko managed to weave the polemic and the plot into a cogent unit that gave the stories a greater purpose.

The Question was probably Ditko's greatest achievement during his many years with Charlton, but Captain Atom is important in a number of ways. Gill's scripts avoided the clichés that commonly beleaguer the superhero genre, and the feature gave Ditko his first opportunity to draw a superhero and a chance to prove himself not only qualified but perhaps the only man for the job. Had Charlton survived, who's to say whether Captain Atom would have fared any better than he has under the guardianship of DC? What matters is that Joe Gill, Steve Ditko, and toward the end, Dave Kaler produced a body of work that can be reprinted but not replicated. For a publisher that some might call "The Little Company That Couldn't," Charlton produced its fair share of comics and characters that have not only stood the test of time but still have fans aching for more.

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TOTH'S QUESTION: *The Isolated Exception?*

—Mark Burbey

FAMOUS FOR COCREATING SPIDER-MAN and Dr. Strange, Steve Ditko is equally famed as a fiercely private individualist who subscribes to the philosophy of Objectivism as put forth by Ayn Rand in four classic works of fiction: *We the Living* (1936), *Anthem* (1938), *The Fountainhead* (1943), and *Atlas Shrugged* (1957). When challenged by a book salesman to encapsulate this philosophy, while standing on one foot, no less, Rand obliged and said, "**Metaphysics:** Objective reality. **Epistemology:** Reason. **Ethics:** Self-interest. **Politics:** Capitalism." In an article titled "Introducing Objectivism," she wrote, "If you want this translated into simple language, it would read: **1.** 'Nature, to be commanded, must be obeyed' or 'Wishing won't make it so.' **2.** 'You can't eat your cake and have it, too.' **3.** 'Man is an end in himself.' **4.** 'Give me liberty or give me death.'"

She went on to write that fully understanding and integrating this philosophical system into your life "requires volumes of thought . . . which is why philosophy cannot be discussed while standing on one foot—nor while standing on two feet on both sides of every fence." In apparent contradiction with the described ideology, Ditko himself reportedly lives a life that seems to eschew the rewards of capitalism, yet he accepts no offers of charity and his choices in life have fervently embraced the notion of self-interest. More pertinent to the subject at hand, however, objective reality and reason most certainly fueled the creation of Ditko's two most personal characters: Mr. A and the Question.

Without knowing when Ditko started to assimilate Rand's philosophy into his own life, we have only the evidence of when these principles began to appear in the pages of *Amazing Spider-Man*. Ditko biographer Blake Bell has pointed out that by the end of Ditko's run on the series, Peter Parker had gone from being a skinny science nerd to a character of indifferent confidence reminiscent of Howard Roark in Rand's *The Fountainhead* or John Galt in *Atlas Shrugged*.

In fact, it may very well have been these beliefs that led Ditko to leave Marvel Comics. It's more than coincidence that Mr. A and the Question appeared almost simultaneously in 1967, shortly after Ditko freed himself from what he must have felt was the restrictive yoke of working for Stan Lee. The creation of Mr. A and the Question was the inevitable manifestation of Ditko's burgeoning beliefs and his desire to express them through fiction, as Rand had done.

The first Mr. A story appeared in *witzend* #3 (1967), and the Question ran as a hidden gem in the back pages of *Blue Beetle* #1–5 (1967–68). One of the finest comics ever published, however, is the full-length Question story in the classic Charlton one-shot, *Mysterious Suspense* #1 (Oct. 1968). Two sides of the same Objectivist coin, the characters differ only in that Mr. A is the more strident of the two. The Question was fundamentally the same character made palatable for a mainstream comic book audience without diluting the feature's philosophical message. While the stories had their share of prerequisite fight scenes, the most compelling elements were the scenes of *internal* action as characters found themselves struggling against an undertow of moral turbulence. The fascinating thing about *Mysterious Suspense* #1 is that the Question appears on only seven pages of the 25-page story, while his alter ego, Vic Sage, dominates the narrative in a battle "to uphold proper principles, known truths, against everyone he deals with."

It's the very personal and philosophical nature of the characters and the stories that confine them exclusively to the universe of Ditko. When DC acquired the Charlton characters in 1983 and wove them into the "DC Universe," they seem to have left behind the qualities that made them unique. Captain Atom and the Blue Beetle suffered badly in comparison, but

none were more separated from what gave them purpose than the Question. Originally a fascinating and artistically pure creation, the Question without Ditko is like soft watches without Dalí. Many comics creators like the Question because "he looks cool" but divorce the character from his Objectivist origins because they either don't agree with them or feel that it prevents them from "fleshing him out." He is, however, what he is. We don't need to know his back story. He is what he believes. Right is right, wrong is wrong—black and white. In other words, A is A, which Mr. A (or Ditko) lifted directly from Rand's writings. The point of the original stories wasn't to get to know the Question better or team him up with other superheroes, but to symbolize a philosophy that, like it or not, subscribes to a strict moral standard.

Ditko's Question defies delineation by anyone other than Ditko, in that the character is imbued with a philosophy for living that goes well beyond Truth, Justice, and the American Way. From both a creative and Objectivist point of view, the Question is the Question, and any non-Ditko version is a hollow forgery. One isolated exception appeared in the fifth issue of the *Charlton Bullseye* fanzine in 1976. If there's one artist who has a style as distinctive and revered as Ditko's, it's Alex Toth, and in that magazine he illustrated an eight-page Question story plotted by Roger Stern and scripted by Michael Uslan. In an interview with Roger Stern in *Comic Book Artist* #12 (Mar. 2001), Stern said, "When Bob [Layton] launched *Charlton Bullseye*, one of the things we both really wanted to do was run a new Question story—and since we weren't sure how to get in touch with Steve Ditko, we hit on the idea of asking Toth." In a recent e-mail, Stern added, "Bob Layton had contacted Toth and gotten him interested in the project. His only request was that he work with a professional writer. I wasn't one at the time, but Mike—whom I'd known in college—was. I got together with Mike, worked out the plot, and he wrote the script." Focusing primarily on the action elements with quasi-Objectivist embroidery, the story was faithful to the tone and setting of the originals, and featured a villain from the Question story in *Blue Beetle* #2—the Banshee.

THE QUESTION
CREATED BY STEVE DITKO
PILOT IDEA BY ROGER STERN
WRITTEN BY MICHAEL USLAN
VIC SAGE, CRIME BUSTING TROUBLE-SHOOTING AGE NEWSCASTER FOR WORLDWIDE BROADCASTING WHO, WITH THE AID OF PROFESSOR RODOR'S METAMORPHING CHEMICALS AND HIS NIGHTSTALKING COSTUME OF THE UNDERWORLD ... THE QUESTION!
ART ALEX TOTH
"FILLING IN" FOR VIC SAGE ON HIS NIGHTLY WWB NEWSCAST IS HIS ASSOCIATE, HOSEA LACE ...
TONIGHT, A REPORT THAT THE FIXING FELON, THE BANSHEE, HAS RETURNED TO THE NIGHT-CRIMES OF CROWN CITY! HE WAS BLOWN OUT TO SEA EIGHT YEARS AGO THIS WEEK, AND WAS PRESUMED DEAD!
VIC SAGE IS OUT ON THIS STORY NOW!

Splash page to Alex Toth's classic Question story in ***Charlton Bullseye*** #5, July-Sept. 1976. The Question TM & © 2006 DC Comics.

On **tothfans.com**, Toth said, "The script was good, the characters okay, and I was in a rare good mood to do it—low rate or not—wot th' hell—and it was fun! I had Ditko's version to guide me, so it went smoothly."

Toth recently dismissed as "silly" questions about other artists doing their own versions of purely Ditko-created characters, but Ditko, at his best, is an unparalleled talent in the history of comics. One can argue that the Spirit by Will Eisner and Steve Canyon by Milton Caniff are signature characters, but we know that some of the best Spirit stories were done by ghost artists while Eisner was in the Army, and that various Steve Canyon comics and giveaways were done by any one of a population of cartoonists who could ape Caniff's style. Ditko's Question, however, eclipsed the norms of comic book storytelling. Whether or not one agrees with Objectivism, the Question allowed Ditko to express his beliefs in the form of exquisitely claustrophobic morality plays. The Question's (and Ditko's) Randian view of the world may have been black and white, but the stories were not. Brilliant were the backroom views of impropriety and rationalization where characters found few remedies to the agonies of moral turpitude except those that Ditko prescribed. Reducing the Question to a detective or superhero or "urban shaman" or whatever form he's taken at DC is to abandon everything that gave him a reason to exist in the first place.

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Anxiety in BLUE

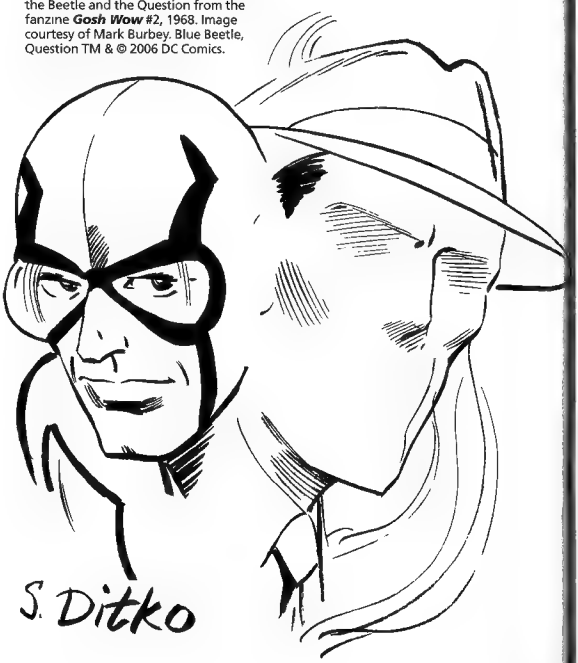
by Gene Phillips

AN OLD SAW CLAIMS THAT ONE CANNOT make a silk purse out of a sow's ear, but it seems no one told Steve Ditko that when, in 1966, he reimagined Charlton's Blue Beetle property, a Golden Age creation who seems to have been a veritable sow's ear among superheroes.

The Beetle appears to have had little going for him beyond a snazzy costume and an alliterative name, lasting long enough to be sold by his original company, Fox, to Charlton in the 1950s, though in that decade Charlton did only a tiny handful of new stories, being mostly concerned with burning off the remainder of the Fox inventory and reprinting a few early 1940s stories. And Charlton's Silver Age revamping of the character, two years before Ditko's efforts, was not particularly noteworthy either. This version was largely influenced by the example of the Golden Age's Captain Marvel, in that the series featured archaeologist Dan Garret finding a magical scarab that transformed him into the superpowered crimefighter Blue Beetle, complete with a magical word (the phrase "Kaji Dha" taking the place of "Shazam!"). Whereas the Golden Age Beetle doesn't have much of any kind of reputation at all, this pre-Ditko Charlton Beetle has been excoriated by fans for bad art and semicoherent stories, and the most one can say of these early Beetles is that their lack of a strong identity may have helped in Ditko's decision to do his own version of the character. To date most fan writers have celebrated Ditko's Blue Beetle as the standout solo version of the long-lived franchise.

Throughout this article I refer to this feature as "Ditko's Blue Beetle," because most evidence attests that he was the dominant creative influence during the character's final Charlton outing, despite the participation of writers like Gary Friedrich and the mysterious "D.C. Glanzman" (who, according to scuttlebutt, was just Ditko himself under an assumed name). In addition, Ditko's Blue Beetle takes a unique place in the history of his work: it is one of two superhero features he renovated after leaving the employment of Marvel, when he abandoned his role in the adventures of another "buggy" hero, Spider-Man. And though Ditko's history with the other Charlton hero, Captain Atom, actually predates his famed Spider-Man tenure, Ditko's Blue Beetle is more significant than his Captain Atom work by virtue of how the Beetle allowed Ditko to express his unique philosophy.

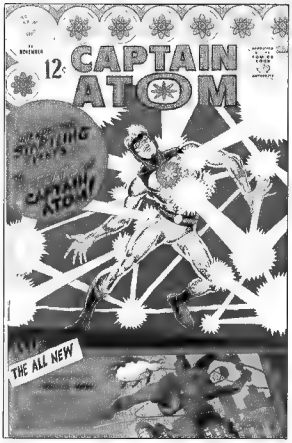
Ditko's tenure on the Beetle was relatively short compared to his 40-plus stories for Spider-Man's regular comic and annuals. He did only four seven-page backup Beetle stories in the *Captain Atom* magazine and six issues of the *Blue Beetle* comic, the last of which was not published in the 1960s, and all of which had their own backups, featuring a new Ditko hero, the Question. The first four backups, all scripted by Gary Friedrich, give Ditko little space for anything beyond loosely sketching the new hero's parameters. The introductory story (*Captain Atom* #83, Nov. 1966) first shows the Beetle scouting his city for signs of crime in his unique flying craft, the "Bug," which is shaped like a giant blue beetle fitted with "hyper-sensitive antennae" to seek for crime, essentially using technology to serve the same purpose as Spider-Man's danger-sensitivity. As the Beetle finds the thugs he seeks and descends to thrash them, one of them helpfully informs the reader that "he ain't the Blue Beetle I once seen," which foregrounds this Beetle's connections with the Dan Garrett version. His first outing isn't a roaring success, as the thugs temporarily escape the hero, but he pursues them and takes them prisoner by using the Bug to lift their getaway car into the air. At story's end the criminals are under arrest



Steve Ditko's enigmatic depiction of the Beetle and the Question from the fanzine ***Gosh Wow*** #2, 1968. Image courtesy of Mark Burbey. Blue Beetle, Question TM & © 2006 DC Comics.

but attempt to revenge themselves on their nemesis by claiming that the Beetle was one of their gang who double-crossed them. Contemporary readers of Spider-Man would have recognized this as one of the dominant story themes employed by Lee and Ditko: the hero unfairly rejected by the community he serves because of envy and idle rumor. In any case, on the last page the Beetle himself wonders "what Dan Garret [sic] would say if he could have seen me today," again making clear that there will be more to say about the earlier Beetle.

The next three backup tales (*Captain Atom* #84–86) have the Beetle encounter a few other minor foes: a masked villain called the Masked Marauder, some pirates, and an octopus (but not one with the title "doctor"). The most important aspect of these backup stories is not the Beetle's enemies, but the establishment of his back-story: his identity as millionaire scientist Ted Kord, and the secret hideout where he maintains his buggy craft. We also meet his assistant (and future love interest) Tracey, as well as some policemen who suspect Kord of knowing more than he tells about the mysterious disappearance of archaeologist Dan Garret during a trip to an offshore locale, "Pago Island." But no hints of the nature of this mystery come to light during the backup series.



First appearance of the new Ditko Beetle in ***Captain Atom*** #83, Nov. 1966, and first issue of BB's new series, June 1967—introducing another Ditko character Blue Beetle, Captain Atom, & the Question TM & © 2006 DC Comics.

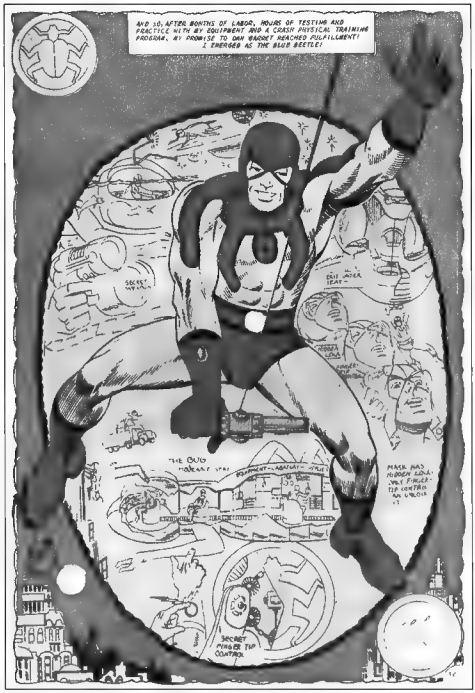
WITH THE FIRST ISSUE OF THE *BLUE BEETLE* comic (cover-dated June 1967, and complete, as noted earlier, with seven-page Question backups), Ditko opens up the strip's potential, as the hero has a rousing battle with the "Squids," a gang of costumed crooks able to scale buildings with the help of suction-cup gloves (perhaps yet another cagey reference to the Spider-Man mythos). The greater threat, though, seems to be the persistent poking about of the police into Kord's affairs, and even assistant Tracey becomes curious about the disappearance of Garret. But all readers learn is that Kord is keeping silent because somehow the events on Pago Island harbor a secret that "threatens the world." One presumes that Ditko, by presenting his new hero as a suspected murderer of his heroic predecessor, wished to create a situation in which the reader was forced to question what he knew of the new hero's nature, rather than blindly accepting him as "the hero." Also in this issue, Kord and Tracey suddenly become romantically entwined.

During the collaboration of Ditko and Stan Lee on Spider-Man, both of these plot elements—the mysterious disappearance and the love interest—would have been developed more gradually and strung out over several issues. This soap-opera approach, key to Marvel's success in the marketplace, was not used by Ditko on his own; one wonders whether he dispensed with this drawn-out approach to storytelling because he wanted to disassociate himself from soap-operatics or because he could not be sure that Charlton would publish the Beetle for the long haul (if it was the latter, the presentiment proved correct). But in any case, with *Blue Beetle* #2, Ditko brings both plotlines to culmination. The story opens with the hero cruising the city in the Bug, but as he passes over Pago Island, he descends to investigate a light. He finds Tracey, looking for evidence of her lover's innocence. Her devotion so impresses the hero that he immediately reveals his Ted Kord identity to the astonished girl, then unveils the secret of Pago Island. In short, beneath Pago Island is a deactivated army of super-androids, invented by Kord's mad uncle Jarvis with the unwitting help of Kord himself, who simply supplied his uncle with some technical assistance, unaware of his uncle's true plans. But after Jarvis's apparent death in a lab accident, Kord found evidence of Jarvis's plot and consulted with his college friend Dan Garret in his capacity as an archaeologist (all unaware of Garret's superheroic identity). When Garret and Kord investigated the island Jarvis captured them, boasting of his plans for world domination, at which point Garret transformed into the Beetle and battled the androids. In the conflict both Jarvis and the original Beetle were killed, but before Garret died he asked Kord to "carry on—for the Blue Beetle!" Presumably, though the script does not say so, Garret meant to pass to Kord his magical scarab, but a cave-in separated the two so that Kord was forced to become a hero via his scientific knowledge and personal athletic training. A deep reading may see this origin tale as a reversal of the Spider-Man concept. Peter Parker loses a saintly father figure and becomes a hero to atone for that "good father's" death, only to be beleaguered by J. Jonah Jameson, a comic "bad father" of no actual relation to Parker. Here it is Kord's real uncle who is a villain and implicitly a stain on the Kord heritage: Jarvis's acts put Kord himself in complicity with evil that can only be corrected by emulating a "good father" from outside the family, the previous Beetle.

As Kord's flashback ends, the secret of the island unearths itself as if in response to Kord's admissions, when the buried androids (previously established to be very slow-moving) finally tunnel to the surface. Lacking super-powers, Kord is obliged to use skill and trickery to propel the androids back into the earth and then to use the Bug to situate huge boulders over all the crevices in the island, in the hope of containing the threat (and Kord's guilty secret). The story ends with the suggestion that

a more advanced android still awaits revival beneath the earth, but nothing ever comes of this in the rest of the Beetle's short run.

Blue Beetle #3 pits the hero against a gang of gaudily costumed thieves, the "Madmen," who are as athletic as the Beetle, allowing Ditko to orchestrate some of his most dazzling fight scenes ever. In addition, Ditko finds a new avenue for his commentary on the public's inability to perceive truth, as he introduces a new weapon to the Beetle's arsenal: a mysterious handgun whose properties remain unknown for most of the story (again, as with the secret of Pago Island, Ditko avoids any interior thoughts on the part of the hero, to avoid disclosing the mystery). In the Beetle's initial battle with the Madmen, the crooks get away with his gun, but though they can't make it work, they can use it on the public with psychological effect, for people regard the gun as some sort of unknown death-ray and are quick to give in to the Madmen's demands. In the Beetle's final set-to with his foes, it's revealed that the weapon is just a flash-gun, and after the Madmen are beaten the fickle public once more champions the Beetle with no admission of their previous errors. Meanwhile, a man who appears to be Dan Garret is sighted in the city, forcing the Beetle to go searching for his predecessor.

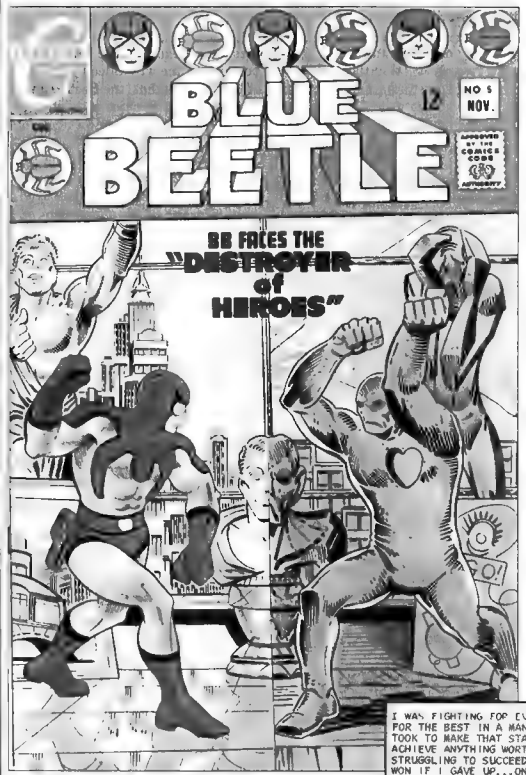

AND SO, AFTER MONTHS OF LABOR, HOURS OF TESTING AND PRACTICE WITH MY EQUIPMENT AND A GRUELING PHYSICAL TRAINING PROGRAM, MY PROMISE TO DAN GARRET REACHED FULFILLMENT! I EMERGED AS THE BLUE BEETLE!
SECRET WEAPON
THE OLD HOKEY STUFF
MASK HAS HIDDEN LOAD-ING PANEL TO CONTROL ON UNION
SECRET PANEL OF TOP CONTROL
The new BB makes a splash in ***Blue Beetle*** #2, Aug. 1967.
Blue Beetle TM & © 2006 DC Comics.

Once again, a plotline that might have been wound out for many issues is quickly wrapped up in *Blue Beetle* #4. The Beetle tracks the renascent Garret to an unnamed Asian country, where he falls afoul of a cult of mask-wearing fanatics. He learns that this "Garret" is merely an impostor, an old acquaintance of the archaeologist who disguised himself as Garret to gain access to the cult's treasure. Since both the impostor and the cult are quickly disposed of, the story seems to be little more than an elaboration of the anxieties of the initial setup, in which Kord is fearful that his predecessor will want to reclaim the Blue Beetle heritage for himself.

IF THERE ARE ANY PSYCHOLOGICAL ANXIETIES in *Blue Beetle* #5, the last issue to be published in the decade of the '60s, they are more oriented toward threats of the future than of the past, as Kord encounters the menace that is—modern art. On a visit to a museum with Tracey, Kord listens impatiently to a snotty art critic extolling the virtues of all modern art "symbolizing man's inability to solve or control the illusion we call existence." Kord and Tracey dislike this critical cant, and so does radio announcer Vic Sage, who is the secret ID of the Beetle's backup strip, the Question. Although Sage appears in the Beetle story, and certain elements of that story appear in the Question backup, neither of the costumed heroes appears in the other's story, making it appear as if Ditko were determined to frustrate fannish expectations of the usual costumed hero crossover. Certainly the "meeting of heroes" is less important to Ditko than the theme of this story, in which Ditko examines what heroism is.

The antiheroic stance of the art critic has its admirers: a bunch of scruffy beatniks who patently favor the idea that man is incapable of meaningful action because they themselves are lazy no-goods. In particular, one beatnik named Hugo, himself an artist, identifies with the centerpiece of the modern-art exhibit, a lumpy, ill-proportioned human figure titled "Our Man." One presumes that the name signifies for Ditko the evils of collectivism, of failing to be a self-sufficient individual. Tracey, Kord, and Sage all turn their backs on the self-conscious hideousness of modern art and its demeaning message regarding human achievement, and move to the part of the museum that displays proper art: predominantly heroic Greek sculpture, incarnating man's ability to achieve great goals. Predictably, the beats abhor "this pretty stuff," and Hugo makes an abortive attempt to destroy one of the statues, because "anything that shows [man] being better than he really is—is evil!" Hugo then becomes obsessed with the "Our Man" statue, goes home to his own art studio (naturally filled with grotesques), and constructs for himself an armored costume based on the "Our Man" image, in which he will attempt again to destroy the life-affirming art. Unlike most supervillains, Hugo cares nothing about looting banks or conquering the world. He is in essence a reverse image of the hero, single-mindedly dedicated to overthrowing what he perceives as "evil." This is not to say that Ditko approves of Hugo: obviously the beatnik's belief in the purposelessness of life proceeds from a failure of nerve and an acceptance of mediocrity, but even so, these are comparatively "idealistic" motives compared to the common venality of most Ditko villains.

Kord, having briefly skirmished with Hugo when the beat tried to destroy a statue, intuits that the museum will be in danger that night and battles against "Our Man." The villain's armor gives him a slight edge, but he's still forced to flee to the neighboring park, where he comes across another heroic



statue, and tries to destroy it. The Beetle thwarts him again, and Hugo escapes. But now his act of attempted destruction has been witnessed by his beatnik buddies, who immediately turn the grotesque vandal into their personal hero. This clash of fundamental principles represented by hero and villain sparks a citywide debate on the virtues of life affirmation versus life denial. Ditko certainly loads the dice toward his viewpoint, making most of the pessimists sound rather stupid, and at least one comment—"I dig a guy that makes mistakes; you know he's human"—sounds like a dig at Marvel's conception of "heroes with feet of clay."

One final time Our Man appears, making another attempt on the museum. Vic Sage is on the scene and tries to stop Hugo even before the Beetle arrives; later, when the Beetle is battling Our Man, Sage prevents a demented beatnik from shooting the Beetle (which is the closest one gets to a "teamup" here). Our Man's lack of belief in achievement works against him, for he quickly loses heart against the hero's dogged opposition. Only the gunfire from the beatnik saves Hugo's hide, allowing him to escape once more, and this time he divests himself of the armor and leaves it behind. It's surprising on one level that Ditko allows Hugo to escape justice, but this was probably for the purpose of having one last laugh on the decadent beats: they find the armor and fetishize it, looking forward to the day when Our Man will return to lead them. Hugo, for his part, privately swears that he will never reclaim the armor, and the issue ends with what might be called a reaffirmation of affirmation.

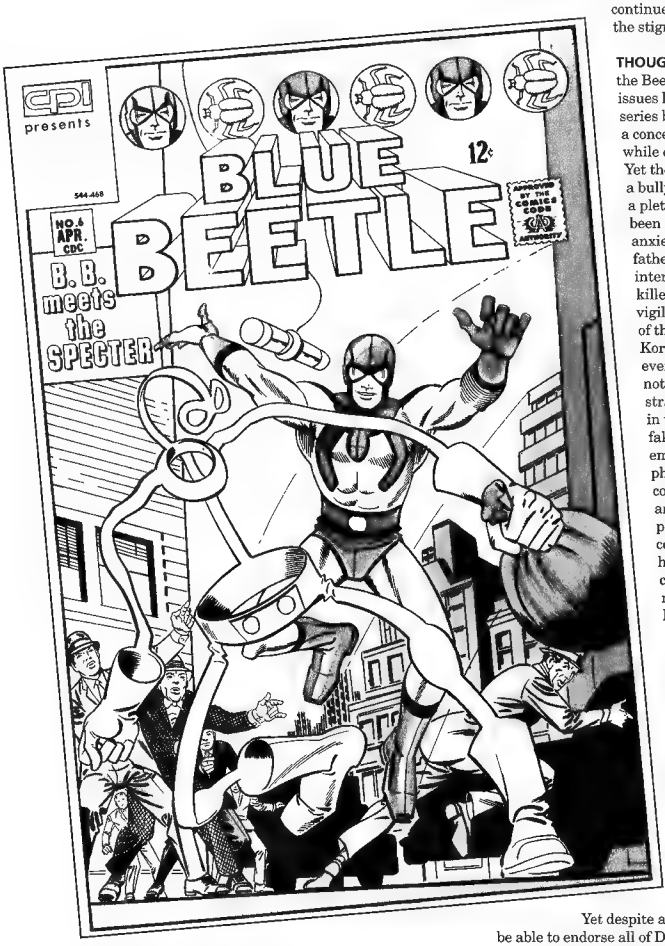
I WAS FIGHTING FOR EVERYTHING IT STOOD FOR,..TO ME! FOR THE BEST IN A MAN WHATEVER IT IS. WHATEVER IT TOOK TO MAKE THAT STATUE...WHATEVER IT TAKES TO ACHIEVE ANYTHING WORTHWHILE! IT CAN ONLY BE DONE BY STRUGGLING TO SUCCEED! "OUR MAN" COULD ONLY HAVE WON IF I GAVE UP...ON WHAT THAT STATUE STANDS FOR, FOR WHAT IT MEANS..TO ME!

Perhaps one of the most important panels in all of comics, from ***Blue Beetle*** #5, Nov. 1968. Blue Beetle TM & © 2006 DC Comics.

IN 1974, WHAT WOULD HAVE BEEN *Blue Beetle* #6 was finally published in the *Charlton Portfolio* (*CPL* "Special Double-Issue #9 & 10"). Interestingly, though suspicions about the murder of Dan Garret were finally put to rest in *Blue Beetle* #4, the question of Kord being a murderer reappears once more. This time the first page of the story, "A Specter is Haunting Hub City," shows Ted Kord observing the demonstration of a new scientific discovery, a uniform that confers partial invisibility on its wearer (making him look like a sort of animated stick figure). Kord doesn't precisely covet the new discovery, but he does "keep thinking of ways I could adapt it to be used by the Blue Beetle!" Then, by no great coincidence, when the suit is stolen Kord gets clobbered from behind and becomes the prime suspect in the death of its inventor. Again, superficial public commentary rails against scientists, conflating the dangers of "nuclear annihilation" with that of unleashing "an invisible killer"—all this a panel before the actual killer even appears! The new owner of the suit, dubbed "the Specter" by the press, then appears and robs the local bank, and Kord is accused of being the new villain. The Beetle invents a way to track the villain when the suit is being used, and manages to interfere with the Specter's next robbery, though the malefactor escapes by turning off his suit. The antiscience debate goes on, with Tracey asserting, perhaps a bit simplistically, that "no man suffered an injustice because someone discovered a new truth."

The Beetle finds a new way to smoke out the Specter, leading to an epic seven-page running battle in which the Specter is finally defeated—and killed. The usual stupid bystanders jump to the conclusion that the Beetle's fists killed the villain, but for once, Kord isn't sure they're wrong. He does show a modicum of remorse over the incident, though his main concern is for the propriety of his actions: "Maybe I don't have the legal right to fight crime." Yet even before the Specter's body is autopsied, Kord refutes this idea, deciding that his heroic mission is more important and that "if I must, I'll operate with the

outlaw brand on me." This proves unnecessary, for the autopsy reveals that the man in the Specter costume was killed by the suit's radiation, and with relief Kord thinks that "the Beetle can continue his fight against injustice without the stigma of a killer over him."



Cover to the unpublished ***Blue Beetle*** #6, from 1974's ***CPL Double-Issue*** #9 and 10 . . . ***Presents the Charlton Portfolio.*** Blue Beetle TM & © 2006 DC Comics.

THOUGH THE TOTAL OF DITKO'S WORK on the Beetle is less than a third of the total issues he did with Spider-Man, no Ditko series before or after the Beetle offers such a concentrated look at Ditko's philosophy while continuing to function as good drama. Yet the character is more than just a man in a bully pulpit, for he seems to be dogged by a plethora of anxieties: anxiety over having been used by his uncle for criminal ends, anxiety over being replaced by a returning father figure, and, most psychologically interesting, anxiety over having possibly killed a man (albeit a murderer) through vigilante action. Even the circumstances of the final story conspire to have Ted Kord covet the invisibility device, so that even though the reader knows that he did not commit the theft/murder, Kord seems strangely (for Ditko, anyway) implicated in the Specter's evil. An evil relative, a fake version of a mentor, an idealistic enemy who embodies the opposite philosophy to Kord's—all these elements also conspire to implicate Kord in their evil, and to tease forth his anxieties over personal guilt. Whereas Peter Parker commits one act of omission that leads him to constantly question the efficacy and right use of his powers, Kord really has no particular skeletons in his closet (guilt over his uncle's evil not being particularly compelling) but acts as if he does. Ironically, it is Ditko's attempt to utterly absolve Kord of guilt, over the issue of having possibly killed a man, that makes him look guiltier than anything else in his history, as his decision to continue his crusade for vigilante justice takes precedence over all else. It may be that this sense of constant anxiety subtly influenced many of the later, non-Ditko portrayals of the character at DC Comics, where he becomes something of a "poor man's crimefighter," often played for laughs at his own expense.

Yet despite all this, and even though one may not be able to endorse all of Ditko's philosophical beliefs, the Blue Beetle will always have the distinction of being among the first costumed heroes to have even put forth any sort of philosophical discourse worthy of being called "philosophy."

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SPACE ADVENTURES

THE GREAT MARTIAN DROUGHT

THE GREAT DROUGHT ON MARS WAS SWIFTLY BRINGING TO A CLOSE A WONDERFUL CIVILIZATION THAT HAD ACHIEVED A UTOPIAN WAY OF LIFE!
MY PEOPLE, THERE ISN'T MUCH WATER LEFT FOR OUR PARCHED PLANET AND VERY FEW OF OUR PEOPLE ARE NOW ALIVE
YES...WE HAD ACCOMPLISHED SO MUCH TO MAKE OUR PLANET PERFECT BUT NOW ALL IS LOST
S Ditko
3948
SURELY, YOU, CLATOR, THE GREATEST AUTHORITY ON WATER AND WEATHER, SURELY YOU CAN CREATE NEW SOURCES OF WATER!
OUR LEADER, MY STAFF AND I HAVE EXAMINED EVERY POSSIBILITY BUT WE SIMPLY CANNOT DO IT! THE STORES OF OXYGEN AND HYDROGEN ARE VANISHING RAPIDLY! SOON IT WILL BE IMPOSSIBLE TO BREATHE!

CHARLTON CLASSIC REPRINT

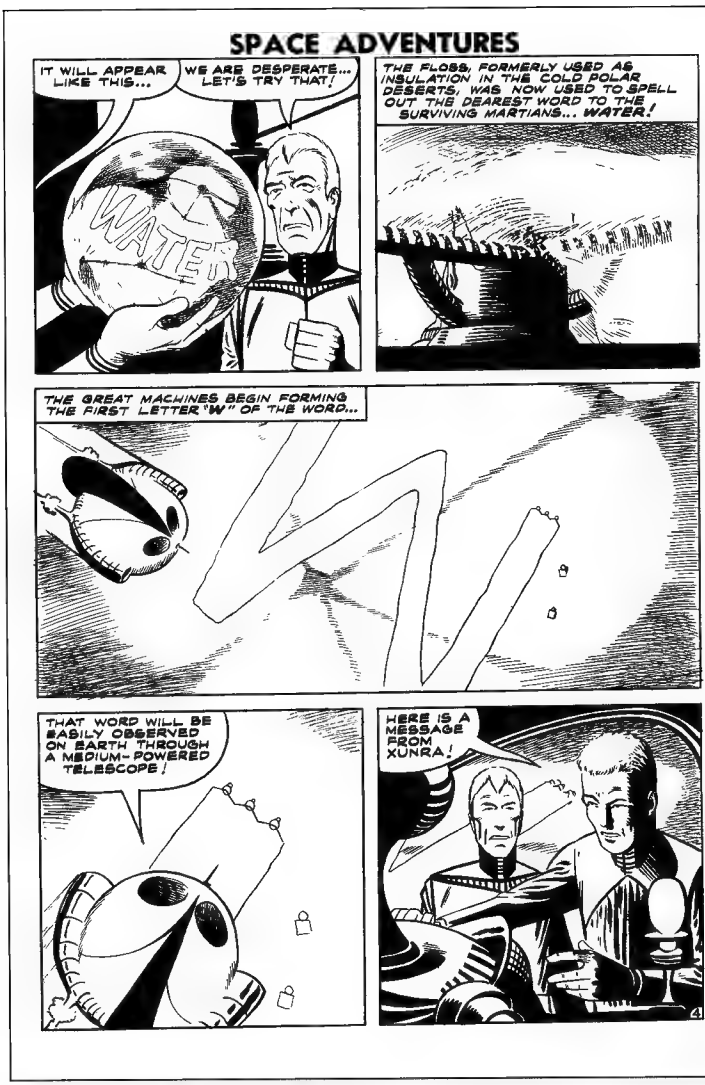
Story: Unknown [*probably Joe Gill*] • ***Art:*** Steve Ditko

Originally published in ***Space Adventures*** #25, Sept. 1958 • © Charlton Comics Group

SPACE ADVENTURES

LET US TOUR THE PLANET ONCE MORE AND SURVEY THE LAND!
SO THE LEADER AND SCIENCE STAFF JOURNEY FORTH ONCE MORE TO SADLY BEHOLD THE DYING PLANET...
TO THINK THAT ONCE THESE REGIONS HAD GREAT VERDANT FIELDS AND FORESTS!
BUT NOW... NOT A MORTAL IN SIGHT... MANY MILLIONS GONE BECAUSE OF NO WATER...
IF WE COULD SIGNAL EARTH... PERHAPS THE EARTHLINGS THERE COULD HELP US...
HOW COULD THEY POSSIBLY HELP US, HENDRU?

SPACE ADVENTURES
OUR LEADER, AS YOU KNOW, WE ARE ON THE VERGE OF DEVELOPING SPACE RADIO FOR COMMUNICATION! MY PRIMITIVE WIRELESS HAS PICKED UP A LANGUAGE FROM EARTH KNOWN AS ENGLISH, WHICH I HAVE LEARNED! EARTH POSSESSES MORE WATER THAN ANY OTHER KNOWN PLANET...
BUT HOW CAN THEY LEARN OF OUR DIFFICULTY? OUR ATTEMPTS AT SPACE TRAVEL HAVE FAILED SO FAR... UNLESS XUNRA ACHIEVES IT... XUNRA IS OUR ONLY HOPE FOR US TO ESCAPE FROM THIS MISERABLE PLANET!
I HAVE IT! SURELY THEY WILL UNDERSTAND AND COME TO HELP US!
WHAT DO YOU MEAN, HENDRU?
WE SHALL PRINT A LARGE ENGLISH WORD THEY CAN UNDERSTAND ON OUR DESERT SURFACES... SO LARGE THEIR TELESCOPES WILL UNDERSTAND!
YOU MEAN... WATER?
YES... WE CAN USE THE MILLIONS OF TONS OF WHITE FLOSS THAT NOW LAY IDLE IN OUR STORES! IT CAN BE DONE QUICKLY WITH OUR CANAL BUILDING MACHINES!
IT IS WORTH A TRY!


SPACE ADVENTURES
IT WILL APPEAR LIKE THIS...
WE ARE DESPERATE... LET'S TRY THAT!
WATER
THE FLOSS, FORMERLY USED AS INSULATION IN THE COLD POLAR DESERTS, WAS NOW USED TO SPELL OUT THE DEAREST WORD TO THE SURVIVING MARTIANS... WATER!
THE GREAT MACHINES BEGIN FORMING THE FIRST LETTER "W" OF THE WORD...
THAT WORD WILL BE EASILY OBSERVED ON EARTH THROUGH A MEDIUM-POWERED TELESCOPE!
HERE IS A MESSAGE FROM XUNRA!

SPACE ADVENTURES

XUNRA HAS TESTED AND PERFECTED THE SPACESHIP! HE SAYS WE MUST LEAVE FOR EARTH AT ONCE BECAUSE OF HUGE SAND STORMS THAT ARE DEVELOPING ON MARS!

IT IS TRUE THAT IN 1954, EARTH ASTRONOMERS SAW A WHITE "W" SHAPE ON MARS BUT THEY DID NOT UNDERSTAND IT... IT DISAPPEARED IN A FEW DAYS, BLOWN AWAY BY THE GREAT DRY GALES WHICH HAD DEVELOPED!

GRAVES ACTING *Strangely*

THE ULTIMATE EVIL

RECONSIDERED

by Steve Skeates

IF EVERYTHING IN COMICS weren't so boundlessly huge—every character the world's most extreme example of whatever it is he is—every situation supersized, gigantisized, beyond mere importance, beyond even urgency, teetering on the edge of a paranoiac's worst nightmare, so dire, so crucial, with the Apocalypse waiting around every corner, Armageddon down every highway and byway—if three-quarters of the time or more something small, something seemingly insignificant, would take center stage—if the potential for the total destruction of civilization as we know it, the impending annihilation of the entire human race, were a rarity rather than the norm—then maybe someone somewhere might have noticed all the similarities between these two sorcery-infused scripting efforts of mine that may indeed have been written for two essentially competing companies some six months apart, but nonetheless somehow wound up being published at pretty much the exact same instant.

Yet even within the bizarre confines of such an oddly altered reality, some inane other universe let's say, one wherein a large chunk of what lay beneath the garish covers of its pictorial publications had somehow evolved into something calm, serene, and even subtle (which may not be the same as saying "something bland and boring," but if you ask me, that's what it'd be), entities sadly devoid of that bodaciously frenetic craziness we here were once so utterly accustomed to, most especially back in the late sixties—yes, even in that universe, I quite honestly doubt that any apparent redundancy on my part (any duplicity, any self-plagiarizing—call it what you will!) would have been all that busy being measured and contemplated, perhaps even pejoratively judged, within the usually highly perceptive and always overly critical so-called minds of our audience, those who regularly buy and even actually read the periodicals we produce, especially considering that a further complication had been rather blithely (perhaps even unthinkingly) tossed into the mix—a distracting, overshadowing complication caused mainly by the look (the artistic insanity) of the second version of this typically over-the-top tale of mine, that strangely abstract (both artwise and otherwise) Charlton variation—shorter than its predecessor by a full ten pages, yet, in retrospect, I gotta admit (admission itself so often so ironically becoming the very price of admission, that initial step into finally realizing what this writing game is really all about) nowhere near as well honed, as well polished, nowhere near as cohesive, as tightly plotted, as that first one had been.

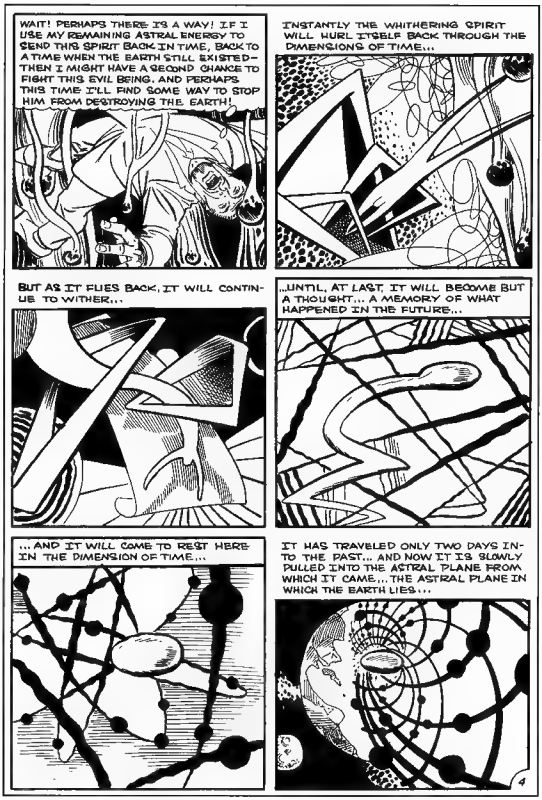
Nevertheless (standing as an eye-widening and more than slightly satisfying surprise, at least as far as I was concerned) that aforementioned second go-round wound up getting the full treatment, ended up being bombastically ballyhooed all over

the cover of the comic book in which it so restlessly resided. There were, after all, three other stories within that particular issue of *The Many Ghosts of Doctor Graves*—yes indeed, just in case the pictures accompanying this diatribe somehow haven't already clued you in, let it now be known that I'm talking here about those wacky ghostly chronicles of a certain Dr. M.T. Graves, his 12th issue to be exact—any one of which could have been cover-featured. Yet this one, the weirdest of the lot (coming damn close in fact to being, especially if you ask me, the weirdest story Charlton ever published) was the one Charlton editor Sal Gentile had decided to bank on—surely more because of that insanely beautiful art than due to anything I had to say, but still. . . .

And to think this all began within, of all places, those staid

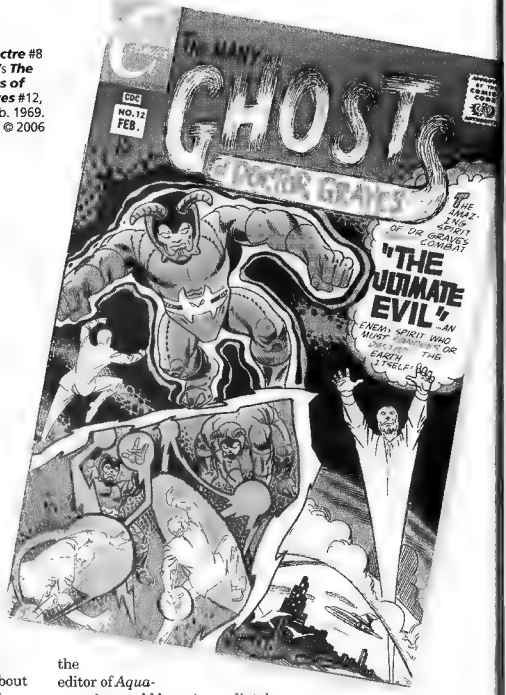
and seemingly antiseptic, seemingly sterile offices of that big-deal enterprise known as DC Comics—could be of course that I'm rather romanticizing the messy garret, the sloppy studio, yet it always seemed to me that that particular organization was forever making it unnecessarily hard on its creative personnel (editors, assistant editors, even the freelancers who would drop by only for a short visit), expecting them to produce anything imaginative and nifty within such a stiflingly stodgy environment. In any event, likely most of you already know how it is that I suddenly found myself working for this peculiar, supposedly prestigious company, so often perceived of as the tired old man of the industry (especially just before my involvement—not that I was ever, mind you, anything more than marginally instrumental in changing any of this). I've told this tale my own self on numerous occasions, as have various others: how the higher-ups at Charlton had abruptly decided (due to flagging sales) to cancel that company's entire "action hero" line, how then-Charlton editor Dick Giordano, not at all pleased by this latest development, decided to finally take DC up on its long-standing offer to move over there, to work for the old man, and how, when he made that jump, Dick brought along with him as sort of a package deal such Charlton luminaries as Jim Aparo, Pat Boyette, Steve Ditko, Sergius O'Shaugnessy (whose real name was Denny O'Neil), and even me.

Now, what this memoir could really use at this juncture is a musical interlude—a soft-pedaled piano and lots of violins—to typically denote the passage of time, plus perhaps even that usual accompanying visual (hoary old chestnut though it may be) of pages falling off a calendar as nearly a year flies by—month after month after month in which I somehow demonstrated to DC's satisfaction my "writing chops" via scripting *Aquaman* plus a particularly silly, supposedly politically dynamic (but in the final analysis actually rather wishy-washy) series whose main function too often seems to me to have been—revealing, I suppose, that a touch of the old paranoia is still somehow hereabouts extant—to dubiously provide (thanks basically to my scripts being extensively retooled by both the editor and the artist, with various "suggestions" for alterations emanating from some bozo over at the Comics Code Authority named Goldwater) yours truly, this downright socialistic, people's peace-mongering correspondent, with the disconcerting momentary rep of being an out-and-out card-carrying fascism apologist. Yep, I'm speaking here of *The Hawk and the Dove,* a thankfully short-lived series, soon to be replaced (to keep me happy, productive, and even ever so slightly in the money) on my work roster by the recently revamped *Teen Titans* revamped in such a spectacular, truly moving, highly dramatic fashion (providing me with the perfect springboard from which to build some of my all-time best stories) by none other than that emotionally supercharged raving egomaniac Robert Kanigher—abrasive? You bet! Yet quite definitely way up there creatively, and just flat-out across the board a far superior craftsman than any of those other "older" scripters DC had been farming stuff out to seemingly forever. In fact, in my honest opinion, this often overwhelmingly obnoxious "blowhard" still stands as one of the best comic book writers DC ever employed.


WAIT! PERHAPS THERE IS A WAY! IF I USE MY REMAINING ASTRAL ENERGY TO SEND THIS SPIRIT BACK IN TIME, BACK TO A TIME WHEN THE EARTH STILL EXISTED— THEN I MIGHT HAVE A SECOND CHANCE TO FIGHT THIS EVIL BEING. AND PERHAPS THIS TIME I'LL FIND SOME WAY TO STOP HIM FROM DESTROYING THE EARTH!
INSTANTLY THE WHITHERING SPIRIT WILL HURL ITSELF BACK THROUGH THE DIMENSIONS OF TIME...
BUT AS IT FLIES BACK, IT WILL CONTINUE TO WITHER...
...UNTIL, AT LAST, IT WILL BECOME BUT A THOUGHT... A MEMORY OF WHAT HAPPENED IN THE FUTURE...
...AND IT WILL COME TO REST HERE IN THE DIMENSION OF TIME...
IT HAS TRAVELED ONLY TWO DAYS INTO THE PAST... AND NOW IT IS SLOWLY PULLED INTO THE ASTRAL PLANE FROM WHICH IT CAME... THE ASTRAL PLANE IN WHICH THE EARTH LIES...
4

Just like old times: prelude page 4 from ***The Many Ghosts of Doctor Graves*** #12, Feb 1969. All Dr. Graves images in this article are TM & © 2006 the respective copyright holder.

BUT HEY, I'M GETTING a bit ahead of myself here, aren't I? After all, for me, the *Teen Titans* didn't happen until the '70s, whereas what I set out here to concentrate on is the late '60s, back when I was one of the few younger writers up at DC, there supposedly to resuscitate the old man, to somehow give that over-the-hill dandy a sorely needed transfusion of vital, youthful liveliness. Though there was the occasional short piece I'd contribute to one or another of DC's many "mystery" anthologies, plus supersilly vignettes for that teenage comedy series, *Debbie's Dates,* I had been for DC essentially scripting two books (one concerning the sea king, the other featuring those aforementioned forever bickering bird-brained brothers), both bimonthlies. Time now, it was suddenly decided, to make me even happier by increasing my work load, giving me a third book to regularly write, while simultaneously allowing me to broaden my horizons (so to speak) by having me work this time around with some editor other than Dick. *The Spectre,* I was quite pleased to learn, was the chosen title, edited back then (and just in case you've been wondering, this was 1968) by the late, great Julius Schwartz.



DC's ***The Spectre*** #8 and Charlton's ***The Many Ghosts of Doctor Graves*** #12, both from Feb. 1969. Spectre TM & © 2006 DC Comics.

The thing is, at that particular point in time, I was totally unaware of the unique manner in which Julie approached his profession, typically in the dark when it came to the fact that this longtime comic book icon was far more actively involved in the plotting process than any other editor up at DC. And still being rather a green kid as far as this writing business was concerned (something—now that I've embarked upon my sixth decade of existence—I've finally come to realize I'll probably pretty much always be), I didn't even bother to find out anything about the manner in which Julie approached the plotting of a comic, though it would have been supremely easy for me to have done so. Instead, I ambled into Julie's well-kempt office armed with a highly intricate plot (typewritten, single-spaced, at least two pages long, most likely even longer—I mean, who exactly remembers those sorts of details?), something I had stayed up half the night before constructing, working, reworking, polishing and repolishing, only to have Julie read it over, extract a couple of ideas he liked, and unceremoniously toss the rest of it away. Then, even as I was busy reeling from the realization that I had during those early morning hours utterly unnecessarily overtaxed what passes hereabouts for an intellect—strained my brain, downed too many pots of superstrong, superthick caffeine sauce, nervously sucked the toxins out of way too many Chesterfields, while (in that fine old tradition that befalls most folks who make their living pursuing supposedly creative endeavors) depriving myself of an uncommonly large load of sorely needed shut-eye, all seemingly for naught—the two of us set about constructing what basically amounted to a brand-new plot based on those couple of ideas of mine that Julie liked, ideas that had somehow gotten his creative juices flowing.

What we came up with was something called "The Parchment of Power Perilous," definitely Julie's title rather than anything of my construction, Julie always seeming to have possessed such an inordinate amount of affection for alliteration. Years later, in fact, Julie would inform me (thereby somehow completely missing what I figured, especially back then, was a fairly obvious Maynard G. Krebs reference) that, had he been the editor of *Aquaman*, he would have immediately transformed the title of possibly my most popular (especially according to the fan press) *Aquaman* yarn from "The Creature that Devoured Detroit" into "The Demon that Devoured Detroit"—more than a tad too alliterative for my taste. But to get back to our discussion of that Perilous Parchment (an outré adventure that ultimately saw the light of day in *The Spectre* #8, Feb. 1969), here unfolded a drama spanning several centuries that, once it entered the scripting stage and especially once it was published, I became and still am quite proud to have been a part of. And, boy, did I love that wild and crazy art that so beautifully enhanced this strange tale of ours. Neal Adams, who had previously penciled *The Spectre*, once cited Jerry Grandenetti as being the perfect artist for this godlike spooky protagonist, the pencil-wielder who should have been drawing this book from day one, and I couldn't agree more. In addition, inker Murphy Anderson was the perfect stabilizing force, his meticulously detailed inks reining in Grandenetti's insanity just enough so that even the latter's wildest notions—colliding planes (no, not aircraft—planes of existence), his frequent disdain for panel borders, the same character shot from two or three separate angles within seemingly the same panel, etc.—became perfectly understandable, making the story truly so much utter fun to follow (even for someone like me who obviously knew exactly where it was going).

None of us—Jerry, Murph, myself, or even Julie (as far as I know)—had even the slightest inkling at that point that this would be Julie's last issue of *The Spectre*. Julie and I, our eyes

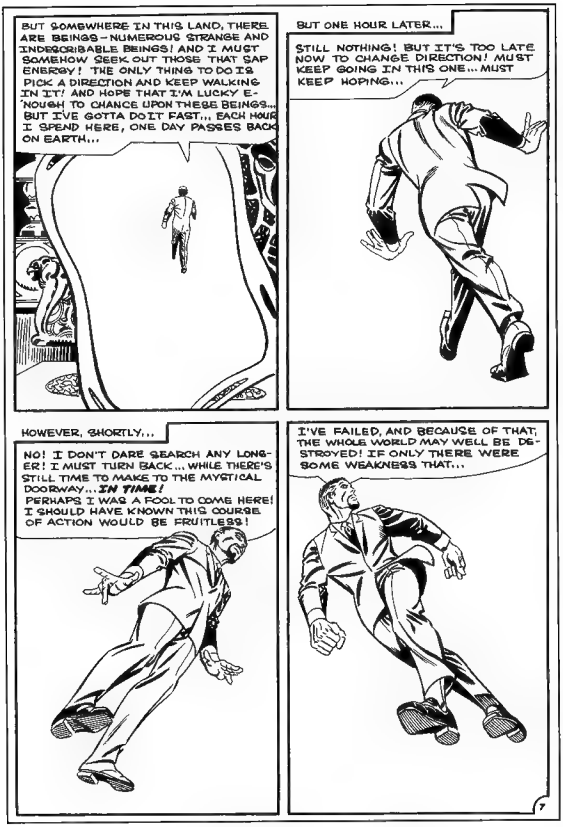
obviously fixed on future issues, had even gone through the painstaking process of "improving" this character, doing so within the typical "approved" DC fashion of making him more vulnerable, giving him a weakness, with the nifty wrinkle of this weakness set up to change from issue to issue to issue—blindness within our first outing, and who knows what it would have been within all those subsequent issues that now suddenly would never be. Fallen arches? Dyslexia? Maybe the next one should have been memory loss, seeing as within the last panel of issue number eight the Spectre clearly states, "I shall never be allowed to forget that one rash moment of mine! It will haunt me the rest of my days!"—and yet, years later, when this hero finally returned to active duty within the pages of *Adventure Comics* in tales edited by Joe Orlando, written by Michael Fleisher, and beautifully drawn by Aquaman alumnus Jim Aparo, no mention was ever made of this ghostly hero's rash act (accidentally nearly killing an innocent bystander). It was like he *had* forgotten, and so had everyone else.

However, quite a bit before this auspicious horrific (the latter basically, I always figured, simply because horror seemed to be the only thing Fleisher knew how to write) return of the Spectre—that is to say, way back within my chosen time frame, the late '60s—an even more ignominious fate awaited this so-called Agent of Good (and we all knew what that particular nickname was really all about, all knew that an extra "o" had been tossed into what this spectral dude was the agent of simply in order to prevent various religious fanatics from complaining too vociferously about what we were trying herewithin to say), while I, who was supposed to be having my horizons broadened, suddenly found them narrowing right back down to where they'd been before this entire enchilada had ever even commenced. In other words, quite ironically as far as I was concerned, *The Spectre* was abruptly yanked out of Julie's stable and handed over to the only editor up there I had been working with seemingly forever, my old pal Dick Giordano. (This was due, I daresay, to that previously parenthetically mentioned industry-wide bugaboo, flagging sales. Obviously a sales report on some previous issue, an issue I equally obviously had had nothing to do with, had finally come in, summarily indicating that Julie's version of the Spectre wasn't selling well at all.) Not that Dick would simply be replacing Julie, while the rest of the team would continue to do what we had just done. That's not the way it was gonna work! Quite definitely—and how could it have been any other way?—I had been looking forward to a long relationship with the Spectre and with Julie, and especially to working rather endlessly with Grandenetti and Anderson, hoping for a gig that would last at least as long as what Dick, Jim Aparo, and I already had going for ourselves with *Aquaman,* but that simply was not to be. The worst part, though, has gotta be that Dick was in no way expected to produce further chronicles of this bizarre being's awesome adventures. Quite the contrary! Instead, per instructions from on high, this superpowerful ghostly superhero was suddenly, sadly relegated to being but the narrator of yet another one of DC's rather tepid "mystery" anthologies, while I even threw my own two cents in by contributing one (but only one) particularly lackluster tale to that short-lived Spectre anthology.

TO MORE FIRMLY GRASP what happened next necessitates the realization that unlike the far-more-economically-savvy-than-I Dennis J. O'Neil, who had immediately severed all ties with Charlton once he started getting work from DC (the latter, after all, paying over twice as much as what Charlton was willing or able to shell out per page), I simply possessed too much affection for what I was producing for that Derby, Connecticut, company to do anything along those lines myself. I had created series I was truly enjoying elaborating upon ("The Thane of Bagarth," "The Sharpshooter"), was scripting cartoony stuff based on movie characters whose antics I had so thoroughly enjoyed as a kid (*Abbott and Costello*), crafted dark, brooding, primal Western fare (*Outlaws of the West, Gunfighters*), and even contributing to Charlton's take on the "mystery" anthology (*The Many Ghosts of Doctor Graves, Strange Suspense Stories*), ghostly compilations somehow edgier, funkier, and far more fun than those produced by DC and Marvel. Furthermore, unlike DC, Charlton didn't require that I first submit a plot outline, get it approved, and then write my story. Instead, I could just suddenly turn in a finished product, on spec, a way of working I very much preferred—diving right in with the plot idea only sketchily there, not boxed in even by myself but allowing the story to work itself out, to go where it wanted to go. Strangely, no one up at DC seemed to mind at all that while working for them I was also working for Charlton. I suppose DC simply didn't see Charlton as being "the competition." That was Marvel; that's who they were vying with, vis-à-vis the marketplace; that's who they were forever trying to outdo, saleswise.

However, now, as we once again cue that piano and all those violins, allowing further pages, approximately six of 'em, to dis-

"THE ULTIMATE eVIL"
THERE IS NOTHING HERE... IN ANY OF THESE TEXTS! NOTHING ON HOW TO WEAKEN ONE'S OWN SPIRIT!
BUT I'VE HEARD THAT SOME WHERE -IN THE LAND OF ENDLESS VOIDS- THERE EXIST'S POWER-SAPPING BEINGS! PERHAPS IF I GO TO THIS WORLD, AND ALLOW THEM TO SAP SOME OF MY POWER, I WILL BECOME WEAK ENOUGH...
INSTANTLY, GRAVES PROJECTS A MYSTICAL DOORWAY, WHICH WILL TAKE HIM TO THE DREAD LAND OF ENDLESS VOIDS...
AND SECONDS LATER...
NOW I KNOW WHY THEY CALL THIS THE LAND OF ENDLESS VOIDS. THERE SEEMS TO BE NOTHING HERE!
6


BUT SOMEWHERE IN THIS LAND, THERE ARE BEINGS – NUMEROUS STRANGE AND INDESCRIBABLE BEINGS! AND I MUST SOMEHOW SEEK OUT THOSE THAT SAP ENERGY! THE ONLY THING TO DO IS PICK A DIRECTION AND KEEP WALKING IN IT! AND HOPE THAT I'M LUCKY E-'NOUGH TO CHANCE UPON THESE BEINGS... BUT I'VE GOTTA DO IT FAST... EACH HOUR I SPEND HERE, ONE DAY PASSES BACK ON EARTH...
BUT ONE HOUR LATER...
STILL NOTHING! BUT IT'S TOO LATE NOW TO CHANGE DIRECTION! MUST KEEP GOING IN THIS ONE... MUST KEEP HOPING...
HOWEVER, SHORTLY...
NO! I DON'T DARE SEARCH ANY LONGER! I MUST TURN BACK... WHILE THERE'S STILL TIME TO MAKE TO THE MYSTICAL DOORWAY... IN TIME!
PERHAPS I WAS A FOOL TO COME HERE! I SHOULD HAVE KNOWN THIS COURSE OF ACTION WOULD BE FRUITLESS!
I'VE FAILED, AND BECAUSE OF THAT, THE WHOLE WORLD MAY WELL BE DESTROYED! IF ONLY THERE WERE SOME WEAKNESS THAT...
7

engage themselves from that imagined calendar somewhere, let it be known that a lot had happened during those six months, a veritable truckload of the sort of personal happenstances that most folks don't even like to talk about yet writers seem to thrive on, enough crazy stuff so that we now find me living alone in a two-story farmhouse out in the middle of a nowhere known as Howard, New York. Certainly I'm aware that most of you who live in other states tend to think of the entirety of New York state as somehow being but an extension of New York City, or at least as being just like that big great city, all tall buildings with way too many inhabitants all crowded in together, but lemme tell yuh, this sad poor dirt-farming community in Steuben County over three hundred miles from NYC, this Howard, was so sparsely populated (my nearest neighbor being three-quarters of a mile away and hidden from my view by all those roly-poly hills that surrounded me) that I always felt, if merely two more people with the same given name as the one I possess had moved into that "town," whoever's in charge of things like this most likely would have changed the name of that place to Steve. But what was I doing there? Well, it's complicated, but most of it stems from the fact that my marriage of three years-plus, amid endless bickering, stormy arguments, and bizarre accusation, had finally dissolved. Thus, alone with myself for the first time in a long time, I was (to evoke a popular cliché) rather at loose ends, not knowing what I should do with that unlikable, unkempt, short-fused, confused and confident-less, pretentious pseudo-commie I had somehow become. Anyway, ultimately, perhaps out of sheer desperation, I adroitly decided I'd simply lose myself in my work (at least my work was something I still understood), go on one big fat seemingly interminable writing jag, churn out scripts as fast as I could, and mail them off immediately (to Charlton of course, seeing as DC would never have allowed me to work in such an insane fashion), often without even reading them over, checking for spelling errors. Or making sure they made sense.

Admittedly, it was during this period that I came up with some of my dumbest ideas—like inserting a totally out-of-place sci-fi time-travel element into that fairly long-standing *Beowulf*-based period melodrama of mine, "The Thane of Bagarth," and doing so merely because futuristic captions would be far easier (far quicker) to construct than those flowery ponderous pseudo-Middle-English blatherings (which at times, I suppose, did possess a certain amount of charm) that I had originally devised for this series. In any event, groping around within the quaint loneliness of that sparsely furnished farmhouse—or, more accurately, groping around inside my head, around the corners and creases and edges of my troubled brain, looking for any story idea around which to bat out some sort of a yarn—I suddenly remembered that fairly intricate Spectre plot that Julie had not that long ago summarily tossed aside. Hey, y'know, I might just be able (especially if I placed most of my emphasis on those portions that Julie hadn't extracted, working on the bulk of my original plot while rather downplaying those couple of ideas that Julie and I had built our new plot on) to transform that baby into a workable Dr. Graves adventure!

MERELY AS FURTHER DEEP background, I suppose I should mention at this point that the Dr. Graves book had been mine for some time, though I hadn't been there for the first issue. In the second ish, however, two out of the three tales therein had sprung forth from my imagination, with one of them ("The Mystic Book") being, in my opinion, one of my all-time best if I do say so myself, rather crudely told, obviously by a rather snotty youngster, yet still a particularly well-spun *Twilight Zone* pastiche. And after that, until something like the thirteenth issue, every story in there was by me. Looking back at that particular outpouring, I do find a lot in there of which I am (and, to my way of thinking, quite deservedly so) enormously proud: "The Ghost of Man," "The Triangle," "The Name," "The Cat," "The Perfect Crime," "The Best of All Possible Worlds." Yet, to be sure, there's also mixed in there that inevitable batch of pathetic stumbles, of truly resounding clunkers—"The Keys of Vengeance," "Charming Girl," "Long Distance"—true losers I can easily still

look back on with quite a bit of embarrassment.

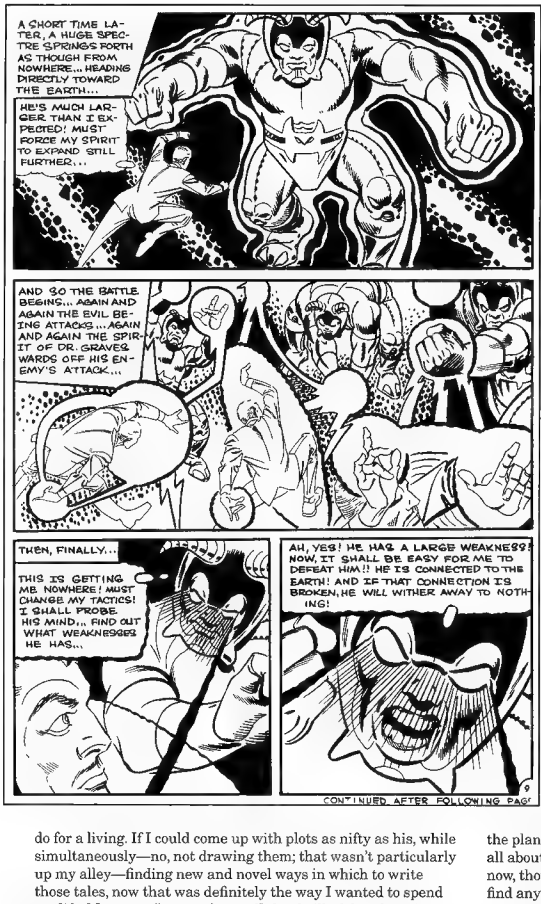
While Dr. Graves more often than not would serve merely as a narrator, informing his rabid readers of all the salient and dramatic pseudo-facts surrounding some bizarre and ghostly occurrence, my personal favorite *TMGODG* tales tended to be those few in which the good doctor, as a spiritualist, a supernaturalist, and an out-and-out ghostbreaker, would get right down in there, get actively involved in whatever story I had to tell. And quite definitely, if I were (as I was) going to have Graves replace the Spectre in a yarn woven around this already worked-out plot, the resultant adventure would certainly be one of those. In addition, always having been (who can say why?) far more into form than content, far more interested in how a story is told than in what any such story is all about, I was quite fascinated by a couple of EC science fiction pieces I had read quite a few years previously, tales in which the author (probably Al Feldstein) had employed the future tense, a tense I'd never before seen used in any work of fiction. That indeed worked its way into these proceedings truly nicely, seeing as there existed within the original version of my Spectre plot a major time travel sequence that would easily allow me to play around with that sort of thing myself, enabling me to toss words like "shall" and "will" around all willy-nilly while intensely pursuing that elusive future tense.

Boom! I was into it, writing this story ("The Ultimate Evil," as I ultimately named it) nearly as fast as I could type. Of course, to in effect have Graves play the role of the Spectre, I could see no way around making certain alterations to my protagonist's makeup, making him far more mystically powerful than he had ever before seemed, more like Marvel's Dr. Strange than anyone else (whose own groundbreaking supernatural exploits had initially been chronicled by Stan Lee and drawn to perfection by that master of all things other-dimensional, Steve Ditko—who, incidentally, as happens too often in this industry, having gotten ticked off over certain working conditions at one of the companies, in this case Marvel, was by 1968 no longer working for that particular publishing firm). Could be, in fact, by making Graves rather a carbon copy of Dr. Strange, I was making him more mystically powerful than even the Spectre himself. Yet I could see no real problem in any of that, unless of course someone up at Charlton wound up doing something supremely silly like assigning the art for this story to none other than Ditko himself—which, as it turned out, is exactly what happened!

Needless to say, still living in the middle of nowhere, working exclusively through the mail, still deeply immersed in my writing jag, and hardly privy to any of the New York City comic book scuttlebutt, I didn't find out about this development until it was way too late to do anything about it, to voice an objection, inform the folks at Charlton that I didn't exactly think their decision concerning the art part was a particularly great idea (not that they would have listened to me anyway)—didn't, in fact, learn of this insanity until everyone else (i.e., the general reading public) did, when the comic in question hit the stands, taken aback there in that drug store in nearby Hornell, New York, gaping at that cover, then flipping through those pages, noting that now Dr. Graves not only acted like Dr. Strange, he looked like him as well, used the exact same hand gestures to open a dimensional portal that looked exactly the same as the ones Dr. Strange used to step through—with, subsequently, all those mystical otherworldly backgrounds making it like you weren't reading a Charlton comic at all but instead like you were perusing an old Marvel. Was any of this actionable? Would Marvel sue?

Still and all, Ditko's art did indeed make my story sing, reminding me once again of how very much down through the years I had enjoyed this man's art. No, actually, there was more to it than that—beyond artistically being a personal favorite of mine, Ditko stood uncommonly tall as one of those who had originally gotten a certain bemused C-student party-animal supposedly-soon-to-graduate college-attending version of yours truly suddenly interested in comics on a professional level, convincing me through his work, through stories he not only drew but plotted as well, that this was something I wanted to

WAIT! WHY DIDN'T I THINK OF THIS BEFORE? I ALREADY HAVE A WEAKNESS... A BIG ONE! BUT THAT EVIL BEING PROBABLY WON'T REALIZE IT, UNLESS I CONCENTRATE ON IT... UNLESS I KEEP THINKING ABOUT MY WEAKNESS!
BUT NOW I MUST GET BACK TO MY STUDY, READ OVER MY MYSTICAL TEXTS AND MAKE SURE THAT I'M RIGHT ABOUT THIS WEAKNESS! AND I'D BETTER HURRY! THAT EVIL BEING COULD STRIKE AT ANY MOMENT!
THEN...
YES! I WAS RIGHT! THAT BEING CAN SUCCESSFULLY ATTACK ME... BY USING A SHELL OF EVIL!
SUDDENLY, DR. GRAVES SENSES THAT AN EVIL ENTITY IS APPROACHING THE EARTH...
A MYSTICAL BEING IS NOW PASSING THROUGH THE MANY ASTRAL PLANES. HE IS HEADING OUR WAY, IN HOPES OF CONQUERING THE EARTH. I CAN FEEL HIS COMING!! I MUST ACT QUICKLY!
DR. GRAVES FINDS THE PROPER MYSTICAL TEXTS, READS THE PROPER INCANTATIONS... SO THAT HIS SPIRIT RISES FROM HIS BODY AND GROWS IN SIZE AND STRENGTH AS IT SHOOTS UP THE VOID OF SPACE...
FEEL


A SHORT TIME LATER, A HUGE SPECTRE SPRINGS FORTH AS THOUGH FROM NOWHERE... HEADING DIRECTLY TOWARD THE EARTH...
HE'S MUCH LARGER THAN I EXPECTED! MUST FORCE MY SPIRIT TO EXPAND STILL FURTHER...
AND SO THE BATTLE BEGINS... AGAIN AND AGAIN THE EVIL BEING ATTACKS...AGAIN AND AGAIN THE SPIRIT OF DR. GRAVES WARDS OFF HIS ENEMY'S ATTACK...
THEN, FINALLY...
THIS IS GETTING ME NOWHERE! MUST CHANGE MY TACTICS! I SHALL PROBE HIS MIND... FIND OUT WHAT WEAKNESSES HE HAS...
AH, YES! HE HAS A LARGE WEAKNESS! NOW, IT SHALL BE EASY FOR ME TO DEFEAT HIM.! HE IS CONNECTED TO THE EARTH! AND IF THAT CONNECTION IS BROKEN, HE WILL WITHER AWAY TO NOTHING!
9
CONTINUED AFTER FOLLOWING PAGE

do for a living. If I could come up with plots as nifty as his, while simultaneously—no, not drawing them; that wasn't particularly up my alley—finding new and novel ways in which to write those tales, now that was definitely the way I wanted to spend my life. Moreover, I remember well the thrill of that first time when as a neophyte scripter I learned that none other than the Great Ditko (hmmm . . . sounds rather like someone who'd have himself shot out of a cannon) would be illustrating one of my stories, one of my earliest efforts, a tale for that newly born (and too soon to die) company called Tower, starring that spooky android known as NoMan entitled "To Fight Alone," definitely no great shakes as a story (I was still pretty much struggling, trying to get my footing), yet it turned out not bad at all thanks to Ditko's brilliant art. Subsequently, of course, Ditko and I had our problems, our disagreements, owing mainly to our basically diametrically opposed political points of view. Steve was, as a matter of fact, the very artist I alluded to earlier, the one who had helped make my professional life momentarily miserable via retooling certain scenes that made up the so-called storylines in *The Hawk and the Dove*. Yet, here, within the chronicles of Dr. Graves, I had to admit that Ditko's art more than quite nicely complemented my words, admirably emphasizing certain story points I hadn't (at least on a conscious level) even realized I'd put in there.

HOWEVER, SINCE I BEGAN this dissertation by evoking the similarities between these two stories ("The Parchment of Power Perilous" and "The Ultimate Evil"), even referring to them (somewhat hyperbolically) as being the same story, I daresay it's half-past high time that I spoke to that particular aspect—how both the Spectre and Dr. Graves sensed an evil being approaching the Earth, how they both shot up to confront this being (Graves employing an astral projection of himself just as Dr. Strange would have done), the two of them having to grow, to enlarge themselves, in order to properly battle this giant baddie, and even those battles there in the stratosphere possessing all sorts of similarities. Yet there is a loneliness pervading "The Ultimate Evil" that is nowhere near as extant within "The Power of Parchment Perilous"—an outgrowth quite obviously of my own personal predicament, the way I was living at that moment, my own hopeless neurosis creeping in there subconsciously yet beautifully emphasized by this artist who seemed himself to lead such a solitary existence, forever losing himself in his work just as I then had been losing myself in mine. At least in the parchment piece there was interaction between the villain and his mentor, and between the Spectre and his host, Jim Corrigan, not to mention that scene in which the Spectre is reprimanded by God Himself, yet here in "The Ultimate Evil" there were but two characters occupying those 11 pages, the primal battle betwixt good and evil, unwatched, unnoticed, not known about by anyone save the reader.

This subconscious loneliness theme is perhaps best encapsulated within the scene in which Graves enters the Land of Endless Voids, searching for some creature that will somehow sap his strength so that the evil being Graves is about to encounter won't become so frustrated by his inability to defeat our hero that, out of anger, he'll viciously blow to bits the planet Earth. I suppose to fully understand what that's all about you'll simply have to actually read the story. Right now, though, the important thing is that Graves can't seem to find any such creature—or anything else for that matter. All he encounters within this particular dimension is total seemingly bleached utterly white emptiness, basically a blank page Then, having to give up, to turn back, having already wasted too much time pursuing an elusive answer to his problem, a search that simply hadn't panned out, Graves suddenly (out of the blue, with no impetus whatever) realizes that he's not really as strong as he had been thinking, that he does possess a certain weakness, one that if he lets it be known should indeed give his opponent hope. Bad storytelling, that—surely a far better way to have written it would have been to have Graves there in that blank world actually come upon some creature, or better yet a whole batch of nasties, to have him have to fight these butt-ugly five-eyed kill-crazed drooling maniacs and, in doing so, learn of his weakness. Yet there, in my self-imposed isolation, perhaps via devising (or more accurately borrowing and reworking) the essentials, that central battle between good and evil, I had sim-

ply exhausted my ability to imagine any sort of interaction. Perhaps some mental blockage was clogging the creative conduits, preventing me from acknowledging any further the existence of anyone other than myself. I was Dr. Graves, not so much searching for an answer as groping all around for some sort of companionship, creatures to hang with, to hobnob with, to talk about the weather with or whatever, yet (thanks to decisions of my own) encountering instead only a blank page. Extreme mutually exclusive polar opposites taking up residence within but one twisted cranium—desperate for some sort of companionship yet denying it to myself at the same time. Now that's *really* scary stuff!

'Tis furthermore stuff I'd really rather not dwell on, seeing as now, as we finally allow this article to embrace the present, here I am, happy at last (as someone somewhere used to like to say), remarried, enjoying life, and even holding down a normal job—in retail yet—one that hardly forces me in any way, shape, or supervisor's expectations to exactly strain my brain and, considering all of that, all the positive hugeness that (for me) is only too happy to lavishly exist within the here and the now, it does indeed seem more than a little weird that I should look back so fondly—except, perhaps, for that last part there, that previous paragraph up there (in which admittedly I did begin to dig into all that once was a little too deeply, painfully so), yet still basically affectionately—on one of the worst periods of my existence, a time of such utter insecurity, of such neurotic self-doubt and even self-loathing, and perhaps most importantly of such absolute self-imposed alone-ness, yet it was as I hope I've shown the sad, bizarre, and truly crazed machinations of that very period that helped give birth to quite definitely the strangest (and Strangest) Dr. Graves adventure that ever was.

And, that *is* something, I suppose.

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AND SO THE SPIRIT IS REUNITED WITH THE BODY, WHILE DR. GRAVES REMAINS UNAWARE THAT THE WARNING CAME FROM HIMSELF... AND CAME FROM A TIME THAT NOW NEVER EXISTED...
END

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RON FRANTZ
Charlton Memories

Tales of the Great Bolo
and Other Far-Fetched Fables

There was a child went forth every day,
And the first object he look'd upon, that object he became,
And that object became part of him for the day or a certain part of the day,
Or for many years or stretching cycles of years.

.Walt Whitman,
"There Was a Child Went Forth,"
from *Autumn Rivulets*

FEELING LIKE EDWARD EVERETT HORTON must have while narrating those charming *Fractured Fairy Tales* cartoons so long ago, I've several anecdotes to tell that wander a bit off the beaten path. For an aficionado of the often-ignored Charlton line, this takes a bit of doing. Having gleaned most of these stories from personal memory, I've resisted the urge to take the occasional turn for color that some commentators are prone to do. If the stories are not exactly told the way they happened, at least this is the way I remember them.

Our excursion down memory lane begins as a tribute to Joe Gill, who wrote so many of the Charlton comics I loved as a kid. I became a fan of Joe's stories about 1965, when his name began to appear on such titles as *Sarge Steel, Son of Vulcan, Blue Beetle, Captain Atom, Fightin' Five,* and *Jungle Tales of Tarzan.* Seeing an actual name on the credits always added a degree of familiarity to the production, although the practice was not always fashionable. Somehow it made me feel like I was in the company of friends.

For a 12-year-old with a vivid imagination, it was a splendid time to be addicted to any form of escapist literature, especially comic books. The weekly shipment of new magazines arrived at the neighborhood drugstore every Tuesday afternoon. You could almost set your watch by the delivery. Guided by a unbridled sense of enthusiasm, my peering eyes scanned the comic book rack with an intensity that should have browned the paper. There were too many titles to be canvassed in a matter of minutes. Sometimes, much to the chagrin of the druggist, the process stretched into hours. It's a wonder he didn't have me arrested for loitering, or at least point me in the direction of the nearest exit.

The only discouraging aspect was that there were always more titles than purchasing ability. By the time I had been smitten by the collecting bug a year or two later, the problem had become more acute. I missed many of those wonderful Charlton comics when they were published. Finding them on the second-hand market often proved difficult. Looking back at the predicament from forty mileposts down a long and winding boulevard, the best source for old comic books in the Oklahoma City area back then was a bookstore owned by a rather eccentric lady named Mrs. Carter. As I recall, she was a tall, gangly woman of uncertain age who smelled of liquor and wore clothing that looked as if it might have been purloined from Minnie Pearl's closet. Rumor had it she had been married on multiple occasions and preferred the company of younger men. Otherwise, the dear lady was the very soul of dignity.

Her store was located in one of those blighted areas of the city later obliterated in the name of urban renewal. What attracted me to the establishment was that she offered thousands of comic books for sale. These were stacked high on folding tables, a veritable treasure trove of issues dating back to the late 1950s. It was enough to whet the appetite of even the most zealous fan. With the exception of the Marvel superhero titles that were in high demand and priced accordingly, Mrs. Carter sold most of these magnificent specimens of four-colored splendor for a measly five cents each.

It was quite a contrast with a competing bookstore located a few doors down the street. I will admit to not caring much for the proprietor. This fine figure of a man (who liked to wear brightly colored silk shirts and a polka-dot bow tie) professed a loathing for comic books, pulp magazines, and the novels of Edgar Rice Burroughs. Yet it never stopped him from offering them for sale at exorbitant prices. Funny how that sort of thing seems to work. I like to think of it as one of those early object lessons that illustrate how ethics and the profit motive often make for strange bedfellows.

Sounding a bit like radio comedian Fred Allen exchanging barbs with Senator Claghorn, he made a point of insulting my taste in literature while extolling the virtues of collecting antediluvian bibles and *National Geographic* magazine. As you might imagine, I didn't buy very many comics from him. On one occasion, though, he succeeded in selling me a copy of *Tales of the Mysterious Traveler* #11 for the lofty sum of one dollar. He waved it under my nose like a morsel of catnip, and I very much wanted the issue because it had been illustrated by Steve Ditko. The fact that it was the oldest Charlton comic I had ever seen merely added to its allure. It broke my heart when I was forced to sell it a few years later while in the throes of financial embarrassment.

As a pint-sized collector of very limited means, I supported my avocation in the summer months by toiling away in the hot sun, mowing lawns. I paid no attention to any of that malarkey

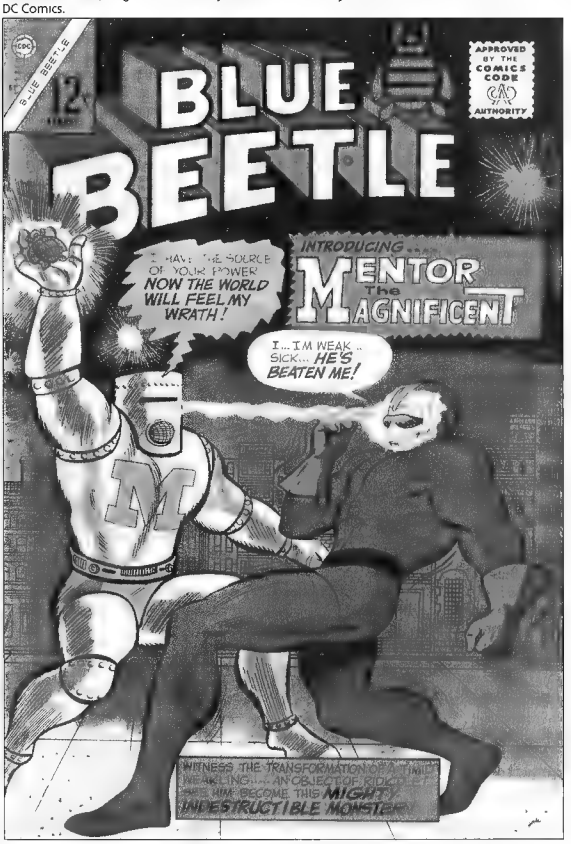
you may have heard about hard work building character. My only motive was to earn as much spending money as possible. Then, with little hesitation, I spent most of it for stacks of glittering memories at Mrs. Carter's store.

I usually carried a battered old briefcase on the luxurious 45-minute bus ride to my destination. I found it to be a tad less conspicuous than lugging several dozen comic books home in a paper bag. I should also mention that it lessened the number of snide comments I was certain to receive from a few narrow-minded adults who had difficulty understanding why a seemingly normal boy would be so preoccupied with collecting comics. I guess they figured I should have been doing something productive, like hanging around the pool hall and learning how to cuss with the other kids.

I can't say for certain what the first Charlton comic I owned with a script by Joe Gill was, but it might well have been *Blue Beetle* #51 (Aug. 1965). I remember buying the issue from Mrs. Carter, along with a handful of similar titles from various publishers. Admittedly, my tastes in literature then were somewhat less discriminating than now. In fact, it took very little in those days to warm the cockles of my tender little heart. If a comic book character wore long underwear and clobbered scoundrels for the sake of duty and humanity, it was good enough for me.

For those interested in such things, the cover to *Blue Beetle* #51 pictured a tussle between the blue-clad hero and a nefarious robot named Mentor the Magnificent. Most of Charlton's covers from this period were quite distinctive, and this one was no exception. Joe Gill's script was, I think, one of his better efforts. If I didn't know better, I would swear that Joe was poking gentle fun at the melodramatic stories Stan Lee had been writing for Marvel. I recently reread the issue for the first time in many years. The story seems to have aged remarkably well.

Blue Beetle #51, Aug. 1965. Cover by Bill Fraccio and Tony Tallarico. Blue Beetle TM & © 2006 DC Comics.


BLUE BEETLE
APPROVED BY THE COMICS CODE AUTHORITY
INTRODUCING... MENTOR The MAGNIFICENT
I HAVE THE SOURCE OF YOUR POWER! NOW THE WORLD WILL FEEL MY WRATH!
I... I'M WEAK... SICK... HE'S BEATEN ME!
WITNESS THE TRANSFORMATION OF A TIMID WEAKLING..... AN OBJECT OF RIDICULE... HIM BECOME THIS MIGHTY INDESTRUCTIBLE MONSTER!

Unlike many of his contemporaries who stood on an ideological soapbox and shouted at the reader using bold explanation points, Joe kept it simple and easy to read. He knew how to tell a story without saturating the pages with unnecessary dialogue and inexplicable action. Personally, I find it to be a refreshing change of pace.

Joe's script was nicely illustrated by the dynamic duo of Bill Fraccio and Tony Tallarico. The sad truth remains that many serious comic book fans have often been critical of the style. Some, in fact, have been known to adamantly despise it. For others it is an acquired taste. In addition to the dozens of stories they produced for Charlton in the 1960s, the Fraccio-Tallarico team busied itself for the better part of a decade turning out a sizable body of work for Dell, Harvey, Gilberton, *Treasure Chest*, and the Warren magazines *Creepy* and *Eerie*.

By the time Fraccio turned up at Charlton in 1955, he had already been a professional illustrator for a dozen years, producing art for such publishers as Hillman, Fawcett, ME, and Lev Gleason. Among these one should not overlook a specific contribution to the much-admired EC Comics line that appeared in *Crypt of Terror* #17 (Apr.-May 1950). Scripted by Gardner Fox, the story was entitled "The Man Who Was Death." If the title sounds familiar, you may have seen the television adaptation of the story produced for *Tales of the Crypt*, which originally aired June 10, 1989, on HBO.

Tripping a bit farther back down the yellow brick road, some may recall Charlton's short-lived *Mr. Muscles* title from 1956. The character was the brainchild of the cocreator of Superman, Jerry Siegel. Having fallen on hard times, Siegel created several new characters for Charlton, including *Nature Boy* and *Za Za the Mystic*. Since these titles were published for only a few issues each, it is probably safe to assume they generated only a bare minimum of interest or sales. If they lack any other redeeming quality, most of the *Mr. Muscles* stories were nicely drawn by Bill

Portait of Col. George A. Taylor, 16th Infantry regiment commanding officer, by one of his soldiers, Sgt. William Fraccio. Date unknown but probably during the Allied invasion. From the War Chronicles Web site at **http://www.warchronicle.com/16th_infantry/officialrecords_wwii/16_pics.htm.** © 2006 the respective copyright holder

Fraccio.

While preparing this article, the sad news reached me via the Internet that Bill Fraccio had passed away. Doing a bit of research, I was surprised to learn that "Sgt. William Fraccio" was a veteran of World War II, serving in Sicily with the 16th Infantry Division under the command of General George S. Patton. This might explain why some of the war stories Fraccio illustrated for Charlton had a more authentic feel than those of many of his colleagues. It inclines one to believe that when it comes to producing story or art, an ounce of firsthand experience is worth more than a pound of research.

Although I may be slightly biased, I believe Joe Gill has never gotten his due for being one of the most prolific writers in the history of the genre. Frank McLaughlin, who has been friends with Joe for more years than either of them would care to remember, once told me a story about a few aspiring comic book writers who tried to get their foot in the door at Charlton in the early 1970s. Most of them wormed their way into the business through the fan ranks by writing letters to comics editors or publishing fanzines. Having failed in earlier attempts to scale the ramparts at Marvel or DC, they figured their chances might be better of latching on with a smaller outfit like Charlton.

Some were fortunate enough to sell a few scripts. Flushed with a smattering of success, they entertained ideas of selling a lot more. However, they failed to realize that Joe Gill had been around for a long time and held a firm grip on the writing chores at Charlton. There was only so much work to go around, and most of these neophytes had no choice but to drift along in search of greener pastures. Strangely, some of them blamed Joe for the situation and held a grudge. For decades, they have gone out of their way to denounce his work, using the equivalent of catcalls and derisive laughter. I daresay that much of this criticism has been inaccurate and unduly harsh. Personally, I see it as little more than sour grapes. Only great restraint keeps me from suggesting that they should depart with all possible haste for the infernal region.

LET US FAST-FORWARD this tale by about 20 years. In 1986, I began publishing a line of black-and-white comics under the ACE Comics imprint, beginning with the acquisition of an obscure Golden Age character named Spencer Spook. Unlike most small publishing houses of the period, mine was essentially a one-man operation. With a marvelous talent for underestimation, I found myself performing the combined duties of editor, art director, production manager, business manager, and advertising director. Every now and then I also swept out the office and emptied the trash. It was too much work for any one person to perform and maintain even a moderate degree of diligence and dispatch. So I usually didn't.

Working my way up from the ground floor, the first thing on the agenda was to find a suitable artist. I had known Pat Boyette for a few years. I sheepishly asked him if he would be interested in drawing some new Spencer Spook stories. Much to my surprise, he agreed with very little convincing on my part. Jerry De Fuccio, the former associate editor of *Mad* magazine, consented to write a script for the first issue. Unfortunately, Jerry was not enamored with the assignment and it soon became apparent that he would not be able to produce a script. The reasons were entirely his own. Instead, Jerry took to writing a series of well-researched articles that were more to his liking. It became necessary to find a replacement. When I asked Boyette if he knew of a good writer who might be interested, without hesitation he recommended Joe Gill. Boyette had illustrated scores of Joe's scripts at Charlton and relished the prospect of working with him again.

At the time, Joe was still working for Charlton in an editorial capacity, packaging various magazines. I could not have asked for a more capable writer. Working with Joe proved to be a pleasure from the very beginning. After giving him a very basic idea of what I wanted, a finished script would be sitting on my desk in almost no time. Joe was so proficient he made it look easy. I am

SAY, HEY...
COMIC SHOPS...IF YOU DIDN'T ORDER ENOUGH SPENCER SPOOKS #1 -ADDITIONAL COPIES ARE AVAILABLE FROM YOUR DISTRIBUTOR!
THE ADVENTURES OF SPENCER SPOOK
I'M A CRITIC AND I SAY - SPENCER SPOOK #1 IS GREAT! I ATE MY COPY THE FIRST DAY!
BIG FUN IS STILL COMING FROM...
ACE COMICS
YOU CAN'T PRINT!
OUR KIDS SHOULD!
THERE'S HOW THEY DO PRINTING IN THE BROOKS !!
THERE YOU ARE, NICE! HAVE A CIGAR!

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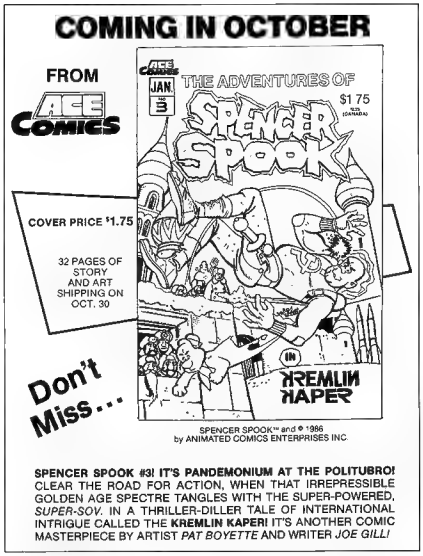
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Don't Miss...
IN
KREMLIN KAPER
SPENCER SPOOK™ and © 1986 by ANIMATED COMICS ENTERPRISES INC.
SPENCER SPOOK #3! IT'S PANDEMONIUM AT THE POLITUBRO! CLEAR THE ROAD FOR ACTION, WHEN THAT IRREPRESSIBLE GOLDEN AGE SPECTRE TANGLES WITH THE SUPER-POWERED, SUPER-SOV. IN A THRILLER-DILLER TALE OF INTERNATIONAL INTRIGUE CALLED THE KREMLIN KAPER! IT'S ANOTHER COMIC MASTERPIECE BY ARTIST PAT BOYETTE AND WRITER JOE GILL!
© 2006 Ron Frantz

proud to say that we worked on seven stories together, including three issues of *The Adventures of Spencer Spook*, three issues of *What Is . . . The FACE*, and one issue of *Judo Joe*. I've no doubt there would have been many more had time or circumstance allowed.

The thing that impressed me most about Joe was his tremendous versatility. He could write almost anything and do it well. I think if I were to have asked Joe for a Greek tragedy written in the style of Euripides, he would have batted it out without blinking an eye. Early in our working relationship, one of the collectors' journals (which I won't dignify by mentioning by name here) published a scathing criticism of a story Joe had written for another publisher. In a telephone conversation with Boyette, Joe expressed concern that I might not want to work with him should I happen to see it.

Joe didn't know me very well at the time, and I could understand his trepidation. For all he knew, I might have been fickle enough to cast him aside in favor of one of those "hot" young writers endorsed by the fan press. Boyette defused a potentially troublesome situation by convincing Joe he had nothing to worry about. Boyette knew I paid very little attention to the babbling of most so-called critics. By my way of thinking, most of their fraternity would be better suited to fumigate termites then to tender an objective opinion about any given subject.

When Joe and I had the chance to talk things over a short while later, we shared a good laugh and proceeded with the business at hand. Boyette (of his own volition) inserted a few jokes about a smarmy-looking critic into the first Spencer Spook adventure. Set at a fictitious comic book convention, the story was nothing but fun and frolic from beginning to end. If you look closely at some of the panels, you will see caricatures of Jim Shooter, Dick Giordano, Alex Toth, Sergio Aragones, John Byrne, and a few other dignitaries rubbing elbows with dozens of comic book characters.

Judging from the fan mail, the first issue of *Spencer Spook* went over pretty well. Even most of the critics seemed to like it. However, one unexpected complication reared its ugly head. Former Charlton Comics editor Dick Giordano, who was then a vice-president at DC, offered some friendly advice. Putting it delicately, Giordano suggested that I not use anything that even looked like a DC character in the future. He explained that there could be legal repercussions.

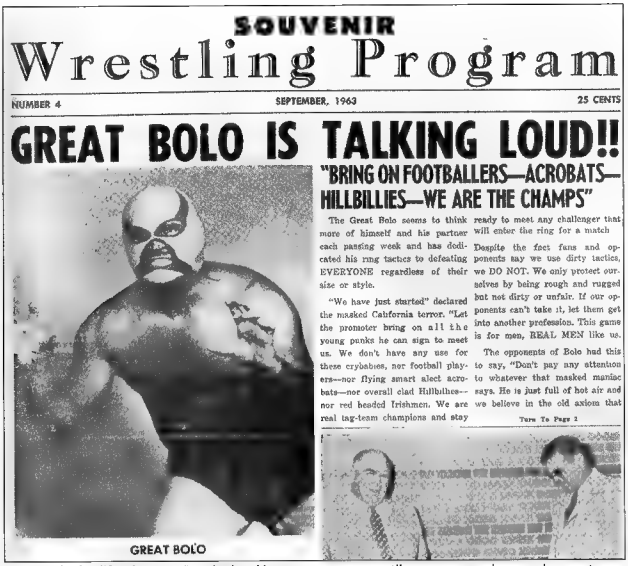
As much as I personally liked Giordano, this struck me as a little odd. Considering that *Mad* magazine had been doing it for years, I felt I was well within my legal rights to use the characters in the form of a parody. Giordano said this was true enough, but he wanted me to be aware that "his company" took a dim view of the practice. DC (and its parent company, Warner Bros.) kept a battery of high-priced lawyers on the payroll and they could put a lot of pressure on a small publisher if they were so inclined. As it was, I was already on thin ice for having the audacity to work with Jerry De Fuccio, who a particular Warner executive hated for personal reasons. Realizing that Giordano had gone out on a limb to bring this matter to my attention, I thanked him for his consideration. A fellow doesn't get too many friends like that in this life.

Actually, none of this was of any great consequence as I had already made plans to move on to a different setting with the second issue. About this time, Vince McMahon and his cast of bit players at the World Wrestling Federation had one of the highest-rated programs on cable television. For a while, it seemed as if you couldn't turn on the TV without seeing a wrestler in a commercial or appearing on one of the late-night talk shows. Like a bad penny, they were turning up everywhere. With this in mind, I thought we might get a few laughs if Spencer Spook were to haunt a wrestling arena. Joe Gill thought it was a good idea, so we decided to run with it.

I don't think Joe had watched a single professional wrestling match since the days of Gorgeous George, but as a personal favor he agreed to watch an least one TV episode of the WWF to gather reference material. When his script arrived, I was delighted to see that Joe had milked the gimmick for all it was worth. In what I thought classic satire, Joe spoofed Hulk Hogan as "Hunk Dolan," and Roddy Piper became the infamous "Ralphie the Ripper." As usual, Pat Boyette did a fine job on the art.

Of course it was all in good fun. I didn't think for a minute that anyone would take it seriously. Believe it or not, I heard from a reliable source that Vince McMahon had seen the issue and was mad as a wet hornet. Apparently he didn't appreciate the humor and entertained notions of suing. For what, I haven't a clue. McMahon supposedly sent the issue to some big law firm to be examined with a fine-tooth comb. Nothing ever came of it. I never heard a peep from anyone associated with the WWF. My guess is that after they had checked my credit rating with Dunn and Bradstreet, they probably figured I wasn't worth the bother. Truth be known, I seldom had two nickels left over to rub together after paying all the bills.

Having dodged a legal bullet with the first two issues, I wanted to do something a little less controversial in the next. The original story I had in mind involved Spencer haunting a space shuttle occupied by two astronauts who happened to be a bickering married couple. While orbiting the earth, Spencer and his crew would encounter an alien space ship planning to conquer the world. I thought the idea had a lot of potential for some good old-fashioned slapstick. The only problem was that a few months earlier the space shuttle *Challenger* had blasted to smithereens on takeoff, killing the astronauts. The wife of one of my business associates (who had a good, tough head on



SOUVENIR
Wrestling Program

NUMBER 4 SEPTEMBER, 1963 25 CENTS

GREAT BOLO IS TALKING LOUD!!

"BRING ON FOOTBALLERS—ACROBATS—HILLBILLIES—WE ARE THE CHAMPS"

The Great Bolo seems to think more of himself and his partner each passing week and has dedicated his ring tactics to defeating EVERYONE regardless of their size or style.

"We have just started" declared the masked California terror. "Let the promoter bring on all the young punks he can sign to meet us. We don't have any use for these crybabies, nor football players—nor flying smart aleck acrobats—nor overall clad Hillbillies—nor red headed Irishmen. We are real tag-team champions and stay ready to meet any challenger that will enter the ring for a match

Despite the fact fans and opponents say we use dirty tactics, we DO NOT. We only protect ourselves by being rough and rugged but not dirty or unfair. If our opponents can't take it, let them get into another profession. This game is for men, REAL MEN like us.

The opponents of Bolo had this to say, "Don't pay any attention to whatever that masked maniac says. He is just full of hot air and we believe in the old axiom that

Turn To Page 2

GREAT BOLO

The "masked California terror," as depicted in contemporary wrestling programs, above and opposite. Originals courtesy of Ron Frantz. © 2006 the respective copyright holder.

her shoulders) seemed to think it would be in poor taste to do a parody of the space program in the wake of the tragedy. Respecting her opinion, Joe and I decided to hold off on the story and do something else.

About this same time, I had been looking to expand the line and began looking for new material to publish. Joe mentioned he had several unsold scripts that were gathering dust and asked if I would give them a look. There was nothing there worth gambling on—or so I thought. One was a rather strait-laced adventure story featuring a Russian hero dubbed "Supersov." As much as I ordinarily enjoyed Joe's stories, this one had all the charm of a quart of soured buttermilk. What can I say. Even Shakespeare and Mickey Spillane had their bad days.

On second thought, it occurred to me that the story might adapt nicely for a comedy I thought it might be interesting to introduce the character as an adversary for Spencer Spook. I bounced the idea off of Joe, who loved it. In writing the story, he did a masterful job of combining elements of satire, anachronism, slapstick, and good clean fun into a 14-page story. It wasn't an easy thing to do, yet Joe pulled it off admirably. To this day, it is my personal favorite of the stories we produced together.

A few months earlier I had launched a companion magazine to *Spencer Spook* titled *What Is . . . The FACE.* The character had originally appeared during the 1940s as a regular feature in *Big Shot Comics.* Having been very pleased with his Spencer stories, I asked Joe to write this one, too. While we were assembling a creative team, it was like old home week for some of the gang at Charlton. Joe teamed with artist Steve Ditko and inker Frank McLaughlin to launch the new magazine. You may recall that McLaughlin had inked Ditko during the 1960s on a few issues of *Captain Atom,* following the death of Rocke Mastoserio. For me, it was fun to get them together again, although I am not certain they felt that way about it.

Although I was the "editor" of record, my primary contribution to the venture was to purchase the publishing rights to the character. Beyond the initial planning stage, I stepped back and let the other guys take the ball and run with it. They had close to a century of combined experience, and I figured they really didn't need me around to bollix up the works. I thought the finished story turned out well. My only regret is that it didn't sell better. Having noticed that so many former Charlton people were now contributing to my ACE Comics line, one reviewer tersely stated that I should have named the company Charlton Comics Central. It made me feel a little uncomfortable at the time, but I admit that he was not far wrong. For the record, I will say that none of this was deliberate on my part. It just worked out that way.

ONE AFTERNOON, I RECEIVED an unexpected phone call from a science fiction writer named Harlan Ellison. Although I had never read any of his books, I knew who he was by reputation. About a dozen years earlier, I had briefly listened to Ellison speak to an audience at a Dallas convention. In almost no time, it became apparent to me that he wasn't the nicest guy in the world. Acting as if he had a king-sized chip on his shoulder, Ellison became verbally abusive (and made a very crude gesture) to a fan who asked what seemed to be a polite question. I left the room at that point, not caring to listen to anything else he had to say. I remember thinking at the time that if Ellison had pulled a stunt like that at a convention in Oklahoma City, he might have had his rear end booted all the way out to the parking lot.

After introducing himself, Ellison said he had read the first issue of *The FACE* and called to tell me how much he enjoyed it. With that incident in Dallas still lingering in my memory, I wasn't sure if I wanted to talk to him. However, curiosity got the better of me. It has been my experience that strangers seldom call unless they want something. Ellison seemed pleasant enough, but I thought his praise was too opulent to be genuine. Acting as if he were bestowing a stupendous favor upon me, Ellison offered to write a script for a future issue. Along these lines, he mentioned a particular artist that he liked to work with, and hoped that I would acquiesce to his wish should the project came to pass.

Ellison went on to tell me about a weekly radio show he had been hosting in the Los Angeles area. Using a little soft soap, he asked if I might consider being interviewed on his program. Ellison seemed a little annoyed when I didn't jump at the opportunity. As much as I could have used a little free publicity, there was something about his manner that made me question his motives. With Ellison calling the shots, I had a feeling I might come across on radio sounding like Bullwinkle the Moose reciting *A Host of Golden Daffodils.* As it was, I made a fool out

of myself frequently enough without going on public exhibition. I told Ellison I would give his offer some thought and let it go at that.

In closing, Ellison asked if I would be so kind as to send him complimentary copies of my comics for review purposes. The next day, I shipped him a package containing all the comics I had published to date. Call it professional courtesy. A few weeks passed before I heard from Ellison again. This time, I could have sworn I was talking to a completely different person. The congenial fellow I had spoken to previously had been replaced by an ill-tempered ogre. To hear him talk was enough to make the ears bleed.

According to the gospel of Ellison, *The FACE* had gone from exemplary to a botch of unspeakable drivel in the span of a single issue. Like Moses marching down from Mt. Sinai, he pronounced Steve Ditko's art as atrocious and getting worse by the minute. Joe Gill was a second-rate hack who had never written a word worth publishing, and I was a sorry excuse for a publisher for sending such a rotten issue to the printer. Not mincing his words, he let me know that I needed to get out of the business and make room for someone who knew what the hell they were doing. Lastly, Ellison decreed that a "prestigious" writer like himself couldn't run the risk of associating with a publisher who produced such rubbish. After all, he might not be able to remove the stench that would pervade his lily-white reputation.

In very short order, I became weary of trying to figure out what was rattling around in Ellison's head masquerading as lucid thought. If he wanted to rescind his offer to write a story, that was fine by me. I certainly wouldn't shed any tears about it. However, I couldn't resist the temptation to remind him that he was the one who had called me (with his hat in hand) and not the other way around. I suggested that he toddle along like a good little fellow and go annoy someone else. Frankly, I had better things to do.

Of course, Ellison was entitled to his opinion, but I couldn't begin to imagine what he hoped to accomplish by being so unpleasant. Not to be outdone, he rambled on for several minutes more, reiterating some peculiar notion that the story was not accurate in its portrayal of the Fourth Amendment. In case you were asleep that day in civics class, this is the one that forbids the government from conducting unreasonable searches and seizures. While I listened, Ellison became more agitated. Finally, realizing he was doing all the talking, he angrily spouted: "I don't understand you at all! You haven't said a word! Are you hard of hearing or are you just stupid? Don't you have anything to say?"

Actually, Ellison reminded me of some crackpot on the street carrying a big sign proclaiming that the end of the world is coming. Finding it hard to take that sort of thing seriously, I told him he might not want to hear what I thought. Ellison continued to press the matter, as if he didn't know when to leave well enough alone. Finally, with my tongue planted firmly in cheek, I retorted: "Harlan, I think you are full of bullshit!"

Bracing myself for another barrage of insults, I could hear nothing but dead air on the other end of the line. Finally, Ellison started laughing out loud, almost hysterically. For a moment I thought maybe this was some kind of a gag. I could not have been more mistaken. Without warning, Ellison suddenly turned cold as an Eskimo's kiss and muttered in a snickering tone: "Surely, you don't think that YOU can debate ME?"

Perish the thought. Feeling as if my foot had been caught in a dangling participle, I said: "I sure as hell can't outtalk you, Harlan, but if that is the criteria for a debate, hold the phone a minute and I'll let you talk to my wife." A split second later, I heard the distinctive sound of the receiver slamming down. There is no doubt in my mind that the suggestion had thoroughly stuck in his craw. I can't help but wonder if Dick Giordano ever had this kind of trouble when he was the editor at Charlton.

Later, when I had the chance mull it over, I thought Ellison's boorish behavior was actually kind of funny. I honestly thought it would be the last I would hear from him. I am sad to say it didn't work out that way. For whatever reason, Ellison was not content to let the matter he. It probably boiled down to him being unaccustomed to letting someone else get in the last word. My thought is that Ellison didn't want to get his hands dirty, so he found someone else to do it for him.

A short time later, our "debate" continued in a column titled "The Law Is a Ass," published in the June 19, 1987, issue of *Comics Buyers Guide*. The columnist, who happened to be a pal of Ellison, seemingly had compared notes with the great man before writing his column. I found it interesting that in a few specific instances he quoted what Ellison had previously said to me on the phone almost word for word. He later denied it, but that is neither here nor there. Now, in all fairness, I don't think this particular columnist realized he had been played for a patsy. I had no axe to grind with him, although I would have taken great pleasure in giving Ellison a swift kick in the pants.

Just for fun, I sent copies of the column to my resident panel of experts: Steve Ditko, Joe Gill, and Pat Boyette. Ditko just shrugged it off and said very little. He could not have cared less about what some fan magazine writer thought about his art. The bottom line is Ditko liked it, and that was all that mattered to him. Joe Gill, on the other hand, was terribly annoyed. I gathered that this particular columnist had taken potshots at him before. Questioning the parenthood of the columnist, Gill used language strong enough to eat rust from a shovel. I can't say I blamed him. Joe said he thought we were producing a comic book and not an instruction manual on police procedure. He didn't think there was anything in the issue that needed to be chiseled in marble, and I was inclined to agree.

Lastly, when I asked Boyette (who had read the article with some amusement) for his thoughts, he said something to the effect of: "I'm not sure whether or not the law is a ass, but I have no doubt about the columnist."

THERE WAS ONE Joe Gill story that might have been published, but wasn't. It begins something like this:

In addition to *Spencer Spook* and *The FACE*, I had already published two issues of *Robin Red and the Lutins* by Pat Boyette and a single issue of the *Big Edsel Band* by Frank McLaughlin and Win Mortimer. From there, things started to get complicated. Ideas for new titles were coming in from all directions. Steve Ditko wanted me to publish some of his philosophical stories while Jerry De Fuccio envisioned a comic book adaptation of the 1940s radio drama *Light's Out!* I had propos-

als on the table from such notables as Jerry Siegel, C.C. Beck, Frank Borth, and several others. In the midst of this beehive of activity, I had an idea of my own that I wanted to develop. "What the heck," I thought. "Why should everyone else have all the fun?"

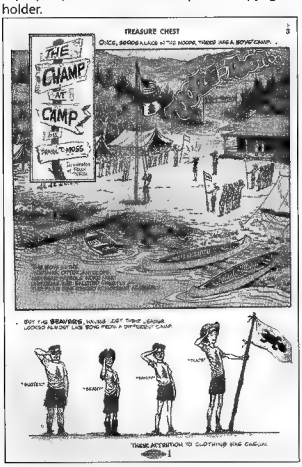
The basic idea went all the way back to my childhood. When I was about nine or ten, I started to watch the professional wrestling matches broadcast every Saturday night from WKY TV in Oklahoma City. The ring announcer was Pat Boyette's old friend and broadcasting colleague, Danny Williams. I once ribbed Boyette over coffee, telling him that he had missed out on a goldmine by not becoming a wrestling announcer like his buddy Williams. With that deep baritone voice of his, Pat would have been a natural. Pat just rolled his eyes and looked at me as if I were demented. Come to think of it, I am not sure he knew I was pulling his leg.

One of my earliest memories was of a diabolical wrestler named "the Great Bolo." Garbed in a sinister-looking yellow mask trimmed in red around the mouth and eyes to disguise his identity, Bolo might have crippled his own grandmother had she tried to pin his shoulders to the mat. The character he portrayed was so vile that Lucifer himself would have been a gentleman by comparison. Between moments of eye gouging or raking his dirty fingernails down an opponent's back, Bolo would pound his chest with both fists and howl like a banshee. It was enough to send a cold chill running down your spine. He made the wrestling villains you see on TV today look like sissies. Boris Karloff would have adored him.

Although it all seems a little ridiculous now, at the time Bolo was actually kind of frightening. Think of him as a composite of Freddy Kruger and Bozo the Clown. Bolo's wicked deeds in the ring were seldom observed by the referee, who had a convenient habit of looking the other way. I've often suspected that if an official rule book for professional wrestling actually exists, it had to have been printed in braille.

Short of murder, Bolo could get away with just about anything. His major gimmick was to pull a foreign object from out of his tights and stick it under his mask at the forehead. Bolo would then proceed to head-butt his hapless opponent silly. Naturally he won lots of matches that way. On one occasion he managed to incite a full-scale riot at the old Stockyards Coliseum in Oklahoma City. With an angry mob hot on his heels, Bolo actually had to flee for his life to the safety of the dressing room. A host of police officers had to be called to restore order.

Nice Frank Borth page from ***Treasure Chest*** v21, #1, Sept. 9, 1965. © 2006 the respective copyright holder.



About the time the act began to wear thin, Bolo was soundly pummeled during a ferocious battle with a former world champion, "Irish" Mike Clancy. In some respects, Clancy reminded me of the character Victor McLaglen played in *The Quiet Man*, opposite John Wayne. Using his big fist like a shillelagh, Clancy (like the popular 1950s lyric) lowered the boom. Much to the delight of the audience, Clancy ripped off his opponent's tattered, blood-soaked mask, revealing to all the world that the Great Bolo was none other than a middle-aged performer named Al Lovelock. With his head hanging in shame, he reportedly skulked out of town under the cover of darkness, never to be heard from again. You can be well assured that it happened just that way, should any cynic care to doubt.

Of course, this well-rehearsed drama was little more than an elaborate work of fiction. In reality, Lovelock had spent at least twenty years gallivanting up and down the wrestling circuit with varying degrees of success. He developed the "Great Bolo" persona while wrestling in Los Angeles in the early 1950s. Toward the end of his career, he developed a serious knee injury. Lovelock kept wrestling for as long as he could, but the pain finally got so bad that he had to quit. For a time, he worked in the booking office for the local wrestling promoter, selling tickets and such. After quietly fading from the limelight, Lovelock reportedly went to work for an agricultural supply company in Missouri. No one seems to know what happened to him after that.

In many respects, the image of the Great Bolo exemplified the somewhat seedy, carnival-type atmosphere of professional wrestling. Somewhere along the way, the spectacle transformed from sport to a morality play, reiterating in theatrical form the age-old conflict of good vs. evil. The principal cast of characters included the good guy, the bad guy, and a dummy referee. The variations are seemingly endless. Then, one cannot ignore the fact that, in all manner of fiction, the villain has the greatest importance. It stands to reason that without a villain to match wits with, a hero has no purpose. It's a literary device that has been used by almost every fiction writer since the earliest mythology. For decades it has been used to good effect in professional wrestling and, of course, in comic books.

So in the finest tradition of P.T. Barnum, I thought a comic book based on professional wrestling from the 1960s would set the world on fire. There would be pandemonium in the streets, and movie producers would be beating a path to my door hoping to secure the motion picture rights. In case you might be wondering, I really wasn't smoking anything stronger than pipe tobacco. With my imagination running wild I discussed *Tales of the Great Bolo* with most of the old Charlton people I had been working with. I received some interesting reactions.

Pete Morisi, who was nothing if not candid, thought the idea was lousy. He didn't think it would sell in a hundred years. Frank McLaughlin (bless his heart) thought I had totally lost my mind. Steve Ditko said he would reserve judgement until the saw a finished script, but I had the distinct impression he was not aquiver with anticipation. Holding his nose, Pat Boyette wouldn't touch it with a ten-foot pole and said as much. Believe it or not, I even considered pitching the idea to Jack Kirby. Boyette had given me Kirby's phone number and suggested I give him a ring. I started to call once or twice, but never did.

Joe Gill and I had several discussions on the subject. Joe thought it was a quaint idea, with the chance of success being somewhat dubious. But if I was willing pay for his services, he would write the scripts. I couldn't ask for more than that. If the title had gone into production, Golden Age artist Frank Borth would probably have illustrated Joe's scripts. I met Borth

No menace was a match for the great Santo Photo courtesy of Ron Frantz. © 2006 the respective copyright holder

through our mutual friend Jerry De Fuccio, and Frank had been patiently waiting for me to come up with something for him to do. He thought the project might be fun. Some collectors admire the eye-popping *Phantom Lady* stories Borth illustrated in the 1940s for Quality Comics. Personally, I prefer the whimsical work he did for *Treasure Chest* in the '60s, especially one memorable feature titled "The Champ."

The idea I had in mind was a series of stories along the lines of the *El Santo* movies that were filmed in Mexico and occasionally dubbed in English. Santo is a sort of James Bond-type character who, by coincidence, happens to be a professional wrestler. Santo travels the world in search of adventure, correcting evil by drubbing it senseless. In one film, he wanders into a nightclub, suitably attired in a tuxedo and his wrestling mask, smoking a cigarette in a chic holder. Of course, he is instantly recognized by the local rabble who bow and scrape before him as if he were a deity. A champion of truth and justice, Santo is beloved by one and all . . . with the possible exception of the occasional mad scientist, vampire, sex fiend, criminal mastermind, or wrestler of the villainous persuasion. It boggles the mind to think what could be done with such a concept in a comic book format.

When I finally got around to discussing the idea with my attorney, he seemed to think I would be courting disaster by using the name of a real wrestler. The fact that no one had used the "Great Bolo" name for almost 20 years made no difference in his thinking. Phooey! The trouble with most lawyers is that they tend to base their advice on a lot of stupid common sense and logic. After all, that miserable upstart had only been practising law for 20 years, so what could he possibly know about such things? Far be it from me to confuse the issue with facts.

Not wanting to take no for an answer, I did a little research on my own. The name appeared to be free of copyright or trademark restrictions. As far as I was concerned, it was fair game. Since it had been weeks since anyone had threatened to sue me, I was ready to ignore my attorney's advice and do it anyway.

However, as things worked out, it was all for nothing. As usual, my sense of timing left much to be desired. By the late summer of 1987 I was on the verge of bankruptcy. In the span of a few short months, the direct sales market had gone to hell in a handbasket. Distributors were dropping like flies. There came a time when I officially passed the point of no return and it became necessary to find something else to do.

And so *Tales of the Great Bolo* never progressed beyond the idea phase. I had gone as far as preparing a brief outline and story synopsis for Joe Gill to work into a finished script. At one point I considered using the notes as the basis for a novel, but I have since decided that writing fiction requires at least a bare minimum of talent. However, I will say that if I ever come across a good writer willing to take on the project, look out! I once thought about asking Harlan Ellison, but I had difficulty keeping a straight face. Maybe I should have. These days, with a Republican lurking on every street corner, good chuckles are hard to come by.

It has now been almost 20 years since I folded the tents. Little remains of my publishing business but a smattering of gilded memories. I may have lost my shirt in the process, but I had the pleasure of working with some of the finest creative talent the comic book industry has ever produced. That in itself made all the aggravation that goes with publishing worthwhile. For the record, I rate Joe Gill right up there with the best of them. I don't mind telling you that the passing of time has done little to dim my appreciation for his work, dating back to his earliest days at Charlton.

Thanks for everything, Joe. I hope you enjoyed it as much as I did. Remembering the good times, it makes me wish we could go back and do it all over again.

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The Text Story Experiment

a closer look at a change in the Charlton Comics line, 1974–75

by Ramon Schenk

IN 1974, THERE WAS A FRESH BREEZE blowing through the comics department of Charlton. Editor George Wildman was now in his third year on the job, previously serving as a freelance cartoonist and as assistant editor. The former editor, Sal Gentile, had moved on in 1972 and Wildman had been busy getting the line into shape. The news reached the fan press, where Wildman explained himself:

> News has been circulating that a number of improvements have been made in Charlton's line of comics. It's exciting because Charlton has long been "A Sleeping Giant" and what's most exciting for me is to be its Editor during these advancements. When I became Editor of Comics in January of 1972, I knew that there were two kinds of editors—passive and dynamic. Since I have never been content with being just a new cog in an old machine I decided to execute several major policy changes of which you, as readers, have seen the results, but, are probably unaware of the reasons for them. (*Charlton Portfolio* [CPL Special Double-Issue #9 & 10] (1974), "The Last Word," by George Wildman, p. 47.)

Now it was time to reach areas that readers could see the results of: "When I became editor my goal was to give the Charlton line a new look. I felt it was overdue and that 'now' was the time. I gradually hit all areas—writers, artists, colorists, letterers, logos, and the Text pages," he recalled in recent e-mail correspondence.

The process of change was not always an easy one, as Wildman notes: "I stepped on a few toes but I figured it would be worth it in the long run. I got great input from all parties and I'm happy to say the fans spotted and approved of the changes immediately—as did management."

Some of the major changes were immediately apparent. For instance, the new "bullseye" logo that replaced the old red box and "C" in the upper left corner of the covers was personally designed by Wildman (as he related in a letter to a fan quoted in *Charlton Bullseye* #1 (1975), CPL/Gang Publications, p. 2). Another important change was the hiring of new talent. The old bullpen, exemplified by eternal dependables such as head writer Joe Gill and the Charles Nicholas–Vince Alascia team, were kept busy but new creators were also given a chance. This led to a plethora of new personnel. As Wildman remarks, "Charlton was the big stepping stone for talents in those days."

Some of them, such as old pros Frank Bolle, Dan Adkins, Jack Abel, and Tom Sutton, were well-established names or were returning to Charlton after doing freelance work for the

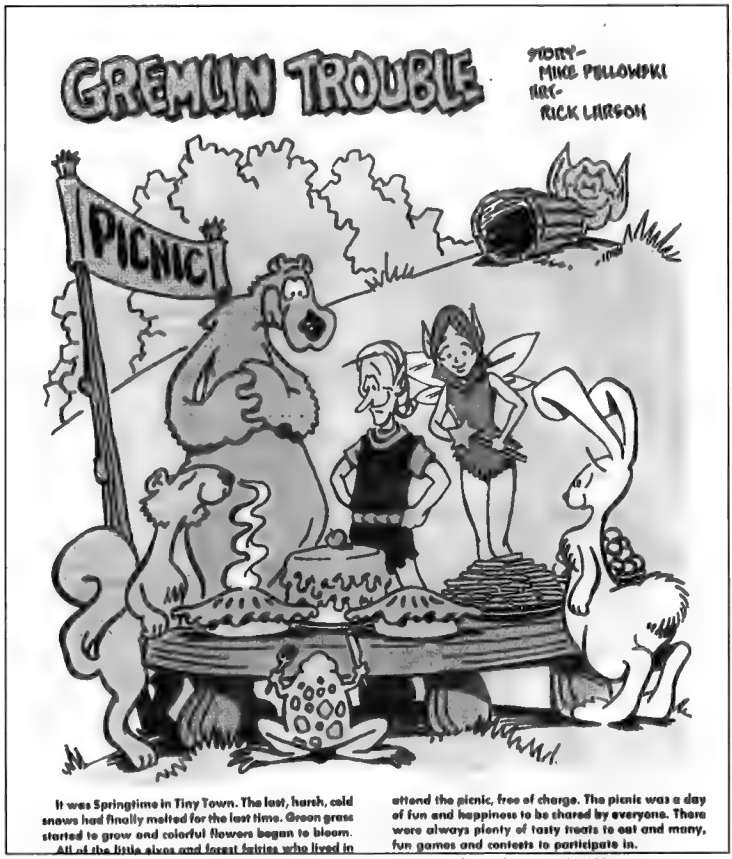
Captain Salty tale from ***Barney and Betty Rubble*** #15, Aug. 1975, with a rare appearance by the late Jim Hanley. © Charlton Comics Group.

Treasure IN THE FISH TANK
STORY: MIKE PELLOWSKI
ART: JIM HANLEY
Captain Salty wasn't just a toy dressed up in a sailor's suit. He wasn't just a cloth doll with lots of interchangeable, aquatic equipment. Captain Salty was alive. He had feelings and emotions just like other
of a shock to the children. Adults wouldn't understand and they would be afraid of the toys. Adults would force their children to throw away the living, magic toys. In order to be safe, Captain Salty and the other

company in the past. (Bolle's first recorded work for Charlton was in 1973, but he started his comics career in 1948; Adkins worked as Wally Wood's assistant before branching out on his own, debuting at Charlton in 1974; Abel had done some work for Charlton in 1967 and returned in 1972; Sutton started in 1972 but had been a professional artist since 1967.) Others were up-and-coming creators. A listing of all the new artists and writers would be too long for this article, but a few of the better-known names are John Byrne, Mike Zeck, Mike Pellowski, Nicola Cuti, Al Milgrom, Don Newton, Warren Sattler, Mike Vosburg, Joe Staton, Steve Morisi (son of artist Pete "PAM" Morisi), Paul Kupperberg, Rich Larson, Tim Boxell, Wayne Howard (who had done some work in 1969, but now returned with a vengeance), and the late, lamented Jim Hanley.

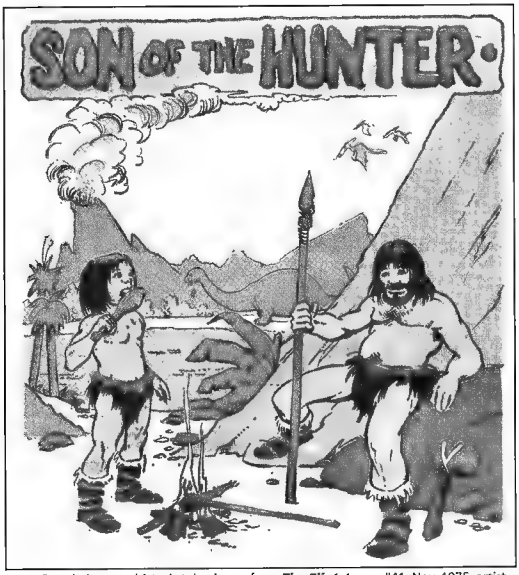
One of the other challenges for Wildman was to improve the text pages. Text pages, both at Charlton and at other companies, were more often than not a drab, sad affair. A technical obligation of the contents in order to get post office qualification as a magazine and therefore cheaper postal and transportation rates in distribution, the typical text page featured journeyman writing. The joke pages often were not funny, the crime pages not thrilling, and the mystery stories not very mystifying. Some titles overcame this drabness by running advice columns (such as "Just Jeannette" in *Just Married, Romantic Story,* and *Secret Romance,* 1969–73, or "Teen-Age Troubles" by "Dr. Harold Gluck" in *I Love You, Love and Romance,* and *Love Diary,* 1971–74) or pages of vaguely related subject matter, like language lessons (such as "Some Simple Spanish" in *Billy the Kid,* by "Raldo Fuerte"), but in general this did not help much.

The text-page artwork was even worse. Quite often the editors used spot illustrations that seemed to have been the work of the office cleaning lady, drawn with a toothbrush. At other times, illustrations were panels lifted from the comic book art pages, sometimes even from the same issue!


GREMLIN TROUBLE
STORY- MIKE PELLOWSKI
ART- RICK LARSON
PICNIC!
It was Springtime in Tiny Town. The last, harsh, cold snows had finally melted for the last time. Green grass started to grow and colorful flowers began to bloom.
All of the little elves and forest fairies who lived in
attend the picnic, free of charge. The picnic was a day of fun and happiness to be shared by everyone. There were always plenty of tasty treats to eat and many, fun games and contests to participate in.
Even Charlton horror artist Rich Larson got into the act, in this Tiny Town tale from ***Dino*** #11, July 1975
© Charlton Comics Group.

Assistant editor and writer Nicola Cuti claims to have come up with the idea of brushing up the text stories. As Nick related in a recent e-mail: "I suggested to George Wildman that we could gear the text pages to the particular comic book. A ghost story for the horror comics, a fairy tale for the kiddie line and an advice column for the romance comics. They were already leaning in that direction, I just thought it should be more specific. I was especially interested in the kiddie line because kids would never read text pages. So I thought if we had them heavily illustrated by the same cartoonists who were doing the comics they might read them or at least have their parents read it to them. George was very enthusiastic about it and told me he even read a few of the early stories to his wife, Trudy."

Wildman knew how to keep the quality up: "We paid the



Stand-alone prehistoric tale above, from ***The Flintstones*** #41, Nov. 1975, artist unknown. Below right, a Max and Waldo story from issue #40, Sept. 1975. © Charlton Comics Group.

same rate to produce a text page as we did any other page in the book." This attracted writers and artists eager to either earn a little money on the side or hone their craft and break into the business.

Starting in the second half of 1974, the text pages received a radical facelift. Cuti started off the new-look experiment with the "kiddie" books: *Popeye*, *Speed Buggy*, *Flintstones*, *Yogi Bear*, and so on. (Perhaps Wildman, himself more a cartoonist than an illustrator, instinctively felt the younger audience for these titles were more inclined to appreciate these stories than the slightly older audiences for the romance and horror comics.)

Typically, Cuti would create a character and write a few stories, setting the tone for the feature. After a while, the feature would be handed over to one of the new writers, almost always Mike Pellowski, but later also Joe Molloy and others. Perhaps the best term to describe the resulting stories is "charming." I mean this in the nicest possible way; the stories had a certain simplistic charm about them, a simpler way of telling a story, that was not often found in the Charlton line.

Take for instance the character of "Captain Salty," who made at least six appearances—beginning in *Popeye* #127 (Dec. 1974) in "The Wall Climber" by Cuti and Wildman—and was therefore one of the more successful continuing characters. His was the story of a group of toys, led by "the cloth doll filled with sawdust" Salty, who came to life and had numerous adventures with their owner, a young boy.

Another example is "Max the Magic Rabbit," a series even more successful than Captain Salty. Max and his friends, including Waldo the Walrus, have all sorts of adventures in and out of Animalville, their home

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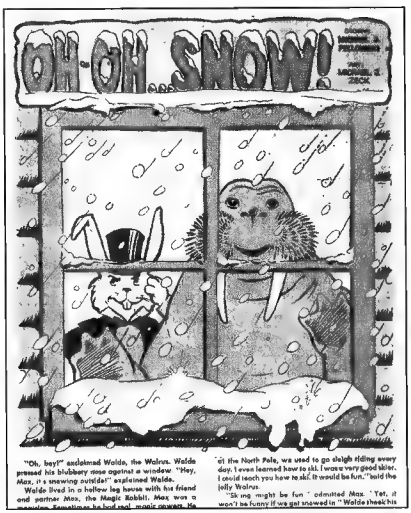
OH-OH SNOW!
"Oh, boy!" exclaimed Waldo, the Walrus. Waldo pressed his blubbery nose against a window. "Hey, Max, it's snowing outside!" explained Waldo.
Waldo lived in a hollow log house with his friend and partner Max, the Magic Rabbit. Max was a
"at the North Pole, we used to go sleigh riding every day. I even learned how to ski. I was a very good skier. I could teach you how to ski. It would be fun," told the jolly Walrus.
"Ski ing might be fun" admitted Max. "Yet, it won't be funny if we get snowed in." Waldo check his

town. As his name suggests, Max is a stage magician who—

> lived in a hollow log, tree house with his friend, Waldo the Walrus. Max and Waldo were buddies and business partners. Max traveled around the Enchanted Forest giving magic shows and demonstrating his mystical powers. That was the way Max earned his carrots. Waldo was Max's helper and assistant. They worked well together on stage and were the best of buddies at home. (From "Boiling Mad," *Popeye* #132 (Dec. 1975).)

Most of the nine recorded Max stories are written by Mike Pellowski, although again the series was created and the first installment written by Cuti.

In total some fifty stories appeared in the fifteen "kiddie" titles published at that time. Some were one-off tales, such as those featuring Buddy Bear, Commando Cat, Jack Snyder, and the inhabitants of Tiny Town. Others, like Captain Salty, Max, Lok the Elf, Flame Sparkle, and the twins Morgan and Melanie Smith, each had several adventures. And there are probably more, hidden in the back pages of the many humor pages of the Charlton line.

The change was not completely absent from Charlton's other comics genres. However, most of the text pages in those books seem to have been created by the regular writers and artists on the title, in the same style, and therefore stand out far less. On the "kiddie" titles, the artists were able to cast off the domineering art style indicated by the licensed property, which allowed them wider latitude.

BY 1976, THE EXPERIMENT was over. The last recorded "experiment" text two-pager was published with a cover date of June 1976 ("The Jesting Tournament," in *Flintstones* #46, by Pellowski and Hort Worden), but that seems to have been a leftover; the majority were published with a cover date between December 1974 and January 1976. "As to the new look diminishing after a year or so, it wasn't planned that way," Wildman explains. "I'll attribute it to the fact that as we grew so did our workload. My time basically was spent on promotions, licensing, travel, production, management meetings, etc. My assistant and staff with their heavier loads became more involved in other areas. We took on new titles and constantly kept updating the regular ones." Basically, because the writers and artists who were doing text pages were needed on the regular stories, Wildman and Cuti had to resort to a more simplistic formula: new text stories with, here and there, a panel taken from a sequential story.

This is confirmed by one of the artists who worked on the text stories. Michael J. Zeck had shown his portfolio to Wildman and Cuti at a New York convention. As he recalled recently, the effort paid off: "A few months went by and they got in touch to offer a text story illustration assignment. That was my first job for Charlton. After about a dozen or so of those assignments I started receiving story work for the horror titles, which was my original desire."

So ultimately, it seems that Wildman's new formula for the Charlton Comics line not only made the line more successful than it had been for years, but it also proved its own downfall. The overall quality of the line decreased drastically during 1976. Not only were the text stories less exciting, the paper and printing took a deep fall in quality as well. I would even go so far as to say that this, among other industry-wide factors, would cause the 1976–77 Charlton implosion, when almost 90 percent of titles were cut and the remainder relegated to reprints and inventory material. But that is a (text) story for another occasion!

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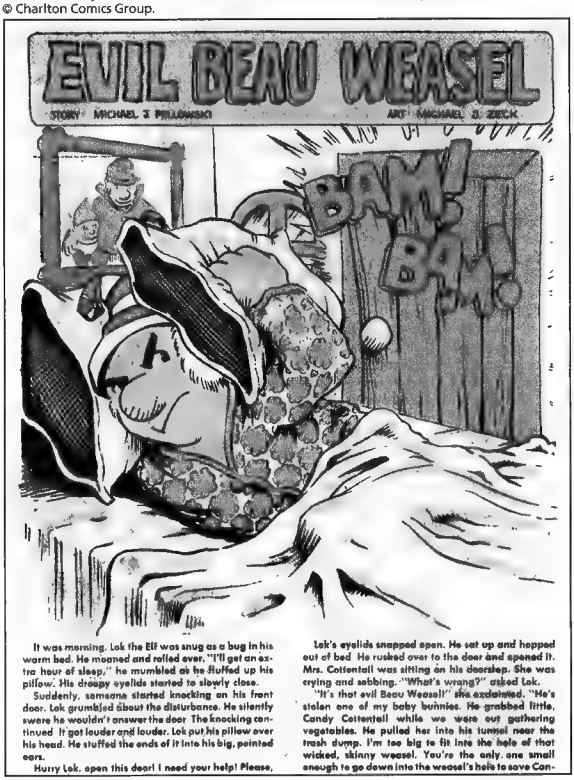
Lok the Elf story from ***Pebbles and Bamm-Bamm*** #29, Oct. 1975, art by Michael Zeck.
© Charlton Comics Group.


EVIL BEAU WEASEL
STORY: MICHAEL J. PELLOWSKI
ART: MICHAEL J. ZECK
BAM!
BAM!
BAM!
It was morning. Lok the Elf was snug as a bug in his warm bed. He moaned and rolled over. "I'll get an extra hour of sleep," he mumbled as he stuffed up his pillow. His droopy eyelids started to slowly close.
Suddenly, someone started knocking on his front door. Lok grumbled about the disturbance. He silently swore he wouldn't answer the door. The knocking continued. It got louder and louder. Lok put his pillow over his head. He stuffed the ends of it into his big, pointed ears.
Hurry Lok, open this door! I need your help! Please,
Lok's eyelids snapped open. He sat up and hopped out of bed. He rushed over to the door and opened it. Mrs. Cottontail was sitting on his doorstep. She was crying and sobbing. "What's wrong?" asked Lok.
"It's that evil Beau Weasel!" she exclaimed. "He's stolen one of my baby bunnies. He grabbed little, Candy Cottontail while we were out gathering vegetables. He pulled her into his tunnel near the trash dump. I'm too big to fit into the hole of that wicked, skinny weasel. You're the only one small enough to go down into the weasel's hole to save Con-

The Best of All Possible Worlds

Working with Jim Aparo

by Steve Skeates

A COP TRYING TO STRIKE UP A CONVERSATION with a troubled young woman seated on a park bench so lost in thought she's not in the least taken aback by the fact that this uniformed officer is actually a three-and-a-half-foot-tall cartoon mouse. The garbled telepathic emanations that surround the sea king as he approaches a strange otherworldly house of worship suddenly and quite enigmatically becoming the surnames of virtually every writer and artist who worked for DC back in those days. The apparent face of Deadman wearing his usual Neal Adams "aaargh" expression—head thrown back, pleading eyes staring heavenward, mouth widened into a silently screaming chasm, a deceased individual ensconced within such truly painful utter exasperation—etched in the rocks in the background (even his clenched fist is there), apparently unnoticed by Aquaman as he blithely swims by. And isn't that Green Arrow standing there amidst the crowd in that undersea community we've suddenly flashed back to? Who knew this formerly extremely gimmicky (his quiver containing every silly sort of arrow imaginable) then suddenly in the sixties made more realistic (and even quite liberalized within his political leanings) goatee-adorned super-dude could with no effort at all breathe water?

Each of these bizarre occurrences took place within one or another story that I had provided the script for, but if you think I had anything to do with these scenes, cleverly crafting such surrealistic insanities (psychodoolic, man -rather admirably reflecting the rampant recreational drug use that infused that era in which these tales first appeared), projecting myself (let's say) into some sort of acid flashback while pounding away on that huge, hulking, ancient (a relic of the thirties, I believe) typewriter of mine, you'd be flat-out dead wrong. Each of the above was pure Aparo—hardly a "head" as were (I must say) a significant portion of the writers and artists (the younger set, the up-and-comers) back in those crazy days. Here instead stood tall and proud salient and positive proof that the brilliant don't need a boost, don't require nonprescription augmentation, hardly (in a nutshell) find it in the least necessary (or even palpable) to employ effervescent embroidery as an artificial leg up into dreamland—the consummate professional (as Jim quite definitely was) so seemingly effortlessly, with no assistance whatsoever, grasping the crazed and dreamy tempo of those times and so succinctly, so beautifully, putting it all down on paper for so many to so thoroughly enjoy.

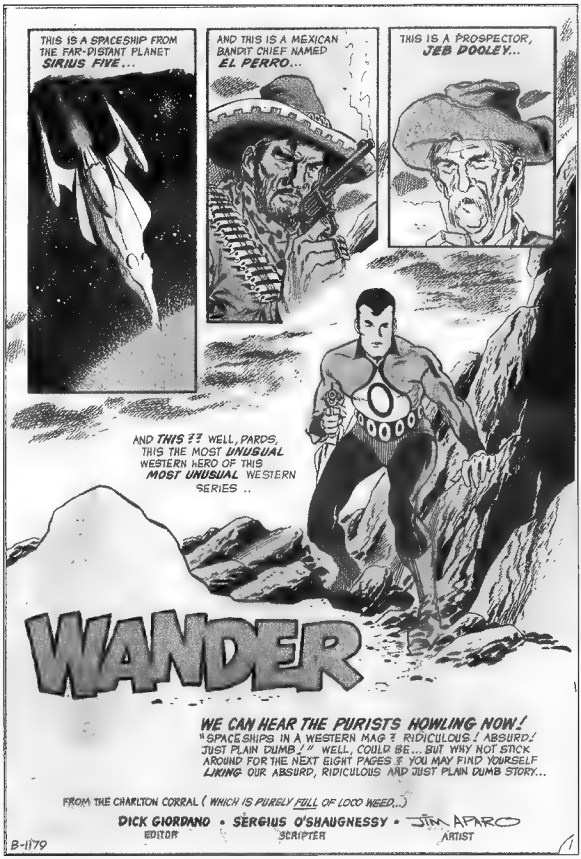
Quite obviously, then, though it may indeed have opened madly, only to then make its way (accompanied by copious parenthetical musings) bumping and stumbling uptown and downtown enveloped, it would seem, within a blindingly bright multicolored haze, this dissertation (in all fairness) actually has so little to do with that odd self-indulgent phenomenon known back in the day as "the drug culture" that even my few minor allusions thereto have begun to strike me (yes, even me, who usually loves traveling in the company of way-out-there tangents) as being rather inappropriately gratuitous. Nor for that matter should this piece be all that busy blathering about any one specific era (fun time though those days may have been), Jim—who, after all, is the subject here—so quickly adapting, his career spanning so many decades, not so much transcending eras (though there was certainly a bit of that going on) but reflecting whatever the times threw out there, even within days far more ruled by anger, obsession, and naked paranoia than were those happy-go-lucky late sixties and early seventies—or were we so stoned we merely *thought* those were happier times?—ultimately becoming, in many a discerning fan's estimation, the definitive Batman artist. Still, since I was there at the beginning—Jim and I in fact both doing our thing within the very first comic book in which Jim's art appeared, a strange supposedly teen-oriented (but talk about transcending—you ask me, despite the pinups of Paul Revere and the Raiders and the like,

From ***The Many Ghosts of Doctor Graves*** #5, Jan. 1968.
© Charlton Comics Group.

THE STRANGE POLICEMAN BEGINS TO WALK AWAY, BUT THEN HE TURNS, AND..
ARE YOU SURE HE'S NOT BOTHERING YOU?
HUH?.. YES OF COURSE, I'M SURE!
OKAY! HAVE IT YOUR WAY LADY! I MUST ADMIT THOUGH, THIS STORY WOULD BE MUCH MORE DRAMATIC IF YOU'D PLAY ALONG!

this book often offered downright sophisticated material, all sorts of humor going on in there—take-offs, putdowns, satire, pratfalls, purposeful travesty, and just plain hilarious observations that could elicit smiles if not out-and-out guffaws from virtually anyone of any age!) Charlton comic with the razzle-dazzle title of *Go-Go,* me writing parodies of fairy tales, quite nicely (with a definite emphasis on the broader aspects of the humor) illustrated by Grass Green, Jim providing the art for something called "Miss Bikini Luv" (not a bad idea at all, seeing as Jim drew such nice-looking women)—I simply can't (not that I really wanna) restrain my mind from drifting back to that particular time. It was, after all, during this period, even while we were both doing our separate song and dance within those pages of *Go-Go,* that for me a certain lengthy string of great luck commenced, being teamed so often with Gentleman Jim—began with ghost stories for *The Many Ghosts of Doctor Graves* ("The Cat," "The Mist," "The Best of All Possible Worlds," the latter of course containing the very scene I began this article by describing—wherein, though my picture descriptions for the panels in question called for a cartoony-looking human being, Jim came up with the far better idea of an upright mouse playing the part of the cop!), more ghostly stuff for *Strange Suspense Stories* and *Unlikely Tales* (*Charlton Premiere* #4, May 1968), and even a nifty, beautifully drawn western ("The Coward") for *Gunfighters.*

And then there was our back-up period-piece series in the *Hercules* book—something called "The Thane of Bagarth," based on *Beowulf,* featuring a by-now-getting-quite-on-in-years Beowulf himself as sort of a father figure, conceived of as one of those endlessly continuing epics (one huge complicated tale with seemingly no end in sight) and designed to fill in that forty-year gap that exists within the original Beowulf legend hey, I had just spent four years as an English Lit. major at a certain college with a fairly competent English Department, so things like that gap were still quite fresh in my mind (whereas now I may say forty years, yet I'm way far enough removed from all that sort of stuff to wonder if I've even got that right—maybe it was only thirty years; maybe merely twenty). In any event, I loved Jim's work on this. The very first page of the very first installment veritably knocked me out, and, as far as I was concerned, Jim's art here (and elsewhere, for that matter) just kept getting better and better—the character designs, the expressions, the action scenes. It was furthermore with this series that I began more and more to trust Jim rather implicitly, learning that, while he would often give me more than I would expect from any artist, he would far more importantly never give me less than what I wanted, and even when he'd often improve on my ideas or add some of his own personal touches (like those detailed at the top of this tribute), he still wouldn't stray all that far from the way I had visualized whatever scene this was while seated there at my messy desk typing up said scene's accompanying captions and dialogue. Perhaps, by being self-taught, by developing his own unique combination of cartooniness and realism, Jim had by chance come up with something (a style, an approach) quite similar to that admittedly slightly askew manner in which I perceived reality. Or maybe it was merely a generational thing. Either way, to employ the hippie freak vernacular of way back then, we seemed very much to be on the same wavelength, seemed to think alike, to see and react to the world rather congruently.


THIS IS A SPACESHIP FROM THE FAR-DISTANT PLANET SIRIUS FIVE...
AND THIS IS A MEXICAN BANDIT CHIEF NAMED EL PERRO...
THIS IS A PROSPECTOR, JEB DOOLEY...
AND THIS ?? WELL, PARDS, THIS THE MOST UNUSUAL WESTERN HERO OF THIS MOST UNUSUAL WESTERN SERIES ..
WANDER
WE CAN HEAR THE PURISTS HOWLING NOW! "SPACE SHIPS IN A WESTERN MAG ? RIDICULOUS ! ABSURD ! JUST PLAIN DUMB !" WELL, COULD BE... BUT WHY NOT STICK AROUND FOR THE NEXT EIGHT PAGES ? YOU MAY FIND YOURSELF LIKING OUR ABSURD, RIDICULOUS AND JUST PLAIN DUMB STORY...
FROM THE CHARLTON CORRAL (WHICH IS PURELY FULL OF LOCO WEED...)
DICK GIORDANO • SERGIUS O'SHAUGNESSY • JIM APARO
EDITOR SCRIPTER ARTIST
B-1179
First appearance of Aparo & O'Neil's classic **Wander** in ***Cheyenne Kid*** #66, May 1968. Wander © the respective copyright holder.

And when editor Dick Giordano moved from Charlton to DC and asked the two of us (along with Denny O'Neil, Pat Boyette, and Steve Ditko) to join him there—that's when I really lucked out! You see, once the two writers of that troupe, O'Neil and I, had greedily (DC paying what seemed to us like "lots" more than Charlton), if not exactly happily (that same company's

"IT'S BEEN FIVE YEARS SINCE SHE DIED & A LOT HAS CHANGED SINCE THEN AND TO TELL THE TRUTH I HARDLY EVER THINK ABOUT HER ANYMORE. BUT TODAY, I DON'T KNOW WHY I FELT STRANGELY COMPELLED TO COME THIS WAY TO THIS COUNTRY ROAD TO THIS SPOT WHERE SHE LOST HER LIFE."
THE MIST
EDITED BY SAL GENTILE
"HER NAME... I NEVER EVEN KNEW IT. SHE WAS JUST THIS WILD KID I MET A COLLEGE GIRL WHO DID CRAZY THINGS! BUT BACK THEN I WAS KIND OF CRAZY MYSELF."
B-1364

Classic Charlton Aparo from ***The Many Ghosts of Doctor Graves*** #8, Aug. 1968. © Charlton Comics Group

long-standing reputation of having everything to do with "long ago" and nothing to do with "now" not being particularly enticing, especially to energetic youngsters who somehow fancied themselves to be "creative geniuses") accepted his offer, Dick asked the two of us at our respective conveniences to drop by his spacious, spiffy new midtown office to pick up our initial big-time DC writing assignments, and somehow I got in there approximately 24 hours before O'Neil made the scene. Thus, for once, I got "first dibs," was given my druthers, allowed to choose between writing for *Aquaman* or scripting *Bomba, the Jungle Boy*. I often wonder how differently my career would have progressed had I here run a bit more true to form—totally disorganized, a tad lazy, confused, bemused, and often even downright timid, all of that could easily have allowed O'Neil to get in there first—and I'm still rather amazed that things didn't turn out that way—and then I'd have been the one stuck writing for that silly subteen jungle denizen. Not of course that Bomba proved to be much of a stumbling block as far as Denny's grasping for stardom was concerned; instead, that book was quickly put out of its misery, whereupon O'Neil struck up a relationship with Julie Schwartz and Neal Adams and helped produce those socially relevant *Green Lantern–Green Arrow* comics that were the talk of the industry and more, garnering loads of publicity within mainstream magazines that usually weren't even slightly interested in comics. Meanwhile, *Aquaman* merely plugged along, hardly noticed, picking up a few fans here and there but hardly setting the world on fire.

Still, the very act of diving headfirst into this particular assignment was simply way too much fun for me to waste time being all that concerned that Aquaman wasn't receiving even an ounce of the ballyhoo I felt he suddenly deserved. Furthermore, rising above and beyond even the infinite pleasure of being teamed once again with Jim Aparo (and I must admit being able to continue our working relationship while tackling this time a fairly well-known and likeable character, a somewhat underrated superhero possessing *so* much potential, making minor alterations to both his personality and his look, placing him within situations the likes of which he had never before experienced—in short, quite definitely making him our own—this was far more than enough reason for rejoicing)—beyond even all of that stood the happy actuality that working with this man I had yet to meet face-to-face, someone who nonetheless seemed to always know, almost instinctively, just exactly where I was coming from and where I was trying to go, did fit in absolutely positively perfectly with certain plans I had already made. Seems, you see, that some three years earlier, I had rather abruptly left college because Stan Lee had suddenly offered me the position of being his assistant editor—a job that didn't quite work out, yet one that landed me in New York City where, being able to truthfully tell other editors that I had just recently worked quite closely with Stan the Man (while somehow failing to mention how truly short-lived our working relationship had been) I easily picked up all sorts of freelance writing work from a whole slew of other comic book companies, and thus my career as a writer was born! But anyway, the main thing is, I had left college a mere three credits short of earning my BA in English Lit, and now, having more or less established myself as a competent writer and therefore figuring I'd be successfully able to work through the mail, I had decided to return to college and finally get my degree.

In retrospect, I sincerely doubt I'd have been able to pull this off (and yes, I did indeed earn that degree) had I been teamed with any artist other than Jim. After all, often, while visiting the DC offices, I'd find myself in the position of checking out artwork that had just come in (produced by someone other than Jim, usually for a one-shot horror or humor piece I'd written), artwork supposedly devised to help in the telling of this tale of mine, and more often than not I'd discover that the artist—and I'm speaking here of even some of the biggest names in the industry—had either completely missed or totally fouled up various important story points I was trying to make. Hey, c'mon now—I've never been all that esoteric, all that into utter obscurantism. Sure, sometimes I'd wind up blaming myself for

IT IS WRITTEN THAT UPON THE PASSING OF HEARDRED, SON OF HYGELAC, THE KINGDOM OF THE GEATS DEVOLVED UNTO THE MUCH PRAISED SON OF ECGTHEOW, BEOWULF. PROUD WARRIOR AND PROSPEROUS HERO. AND SOON THEREUPON, THE NOBLE AND GENEROUS BEOWULF GAVE GREAT TRACTS OF LAND TO THOSE MOST LOYAL THANES WHO FOUGHT BESIDE HIM AT HEOROT WHEN HE SLEW THE MONSTROUS GRENDEL.
AND AMONG THESE THANES, THE GOOD WIGMENRIC WAS THE FIRST TO DIE, WHEREUPON HIS ELDEST SON, THE YOUNG BUT WISE HROTHELAC BECAME THANE OF BAGARTH AND RULED HIS LANDS WELL...
Thane of Bagarth
CHAPTER ONE:
The Feud
UNTIL THERE CAME UPON BAGARTH AND NEIGHBORING ROTHFOR A BRUTAL FEUD, AND IT IS DURING THE MIDST OF THIS FEUD THAT OUR TALE BEGINS...
EDITED BY
DICK GIORDANO
WRITTEN BY
STEVE SKEATES
B-1099
First installment of the immortal "Thane of Bagarth" series that appeared beginning in ***Hercules*** #1, Oct. 1967. © Charlton Comics Group.

whatever mix-up there was. The sorry fact is, though, I began to quite seriously wonder if some of these artists had ever even bothered to *read* my picture descriptions. Anyway, since my name would be on the story, I felt obligated (for the sake of my own reputation and my ability to get any future assignments) to rewrite right there in the office various captions and balloons in order that my words might better fit whatever other story the artist must have had in mind. Of course, nothing even remotely close to that ever happened with Jim. Along these lines, Jim was definitely the best friend any scripter could have!

Yowzah, my man—what a wild fun ride we (and I suppose I'm speaking here of the readers as well as of Jim and I) had, courtesy of the sea king (with Dick egging us on while simultaneously chopping my tendency toward verbosity down just a bit so that there'd be room for the pictures, and Nick Cardy providing those beautiful covers), starting right out with a huge story arc (though we didn't call them that back then) concerning the kidnapping of Mera, lasting a year and a half, and allowing Aquaman at one point to disguise himself by wearing a trench coat and a slouch hat, looking for all the world (thanks to the art, the shadows, the dingy bar he was spying around in, those weird angle shots) like something straight out of film noir. On into trying a touch of social relevance our own selves ("As the Seas Die"), only to follow that one up with an extremely surrealistic three-parter that somehow interacted with the surprise three-part "Deadman" feature in the back of the book written and drawn by Neal Adams. After that, that tome was all ours again, making for even more experimentation (stories within stories within stories, a secret agent parody, a strange little tale about computers and the generation gap) culminating in what many feel to be the best of the lot—I do keep stumbling across various articles about this baby within various fan publications—"The Creature that Devoured Detroit," an epic adventure concerning pollution, Johnny Carson, irresponsibility, and night blindness, in which (for but one thing) we introduced a brand-new superhero, the Crusader, only to kill him off but a few pages later. And then, abruptly, it was over—Dick was leaving his editorial position in order to spend more time on his own art, *Aquaman* was being canceled, and Jim and I basically ended up going our separate ways.

THERE'S A BIT MORE TO THIS STORY than that, though, and this final chapter deserves (I would think) a touch of background palaver, even though I may be repeating myself here, having previously spoken within these very pages (and elsewhere) of exactly what I intend to speak to now: one of the strangest and perhaps saddest aspects of working in comics, how you can work with someone for years and years, feel you know him, even feel a kinship there, yet never actually meet the man. I loved what Pat Boyette did with my mystery stories (mainly for Dr. Graves) at Charlton, yet I never met him, never even talked to him on the phone, never got to tell him so. Once, while visiting the Tower offices, I passed a tall, lanky, well-dressed (a tweed suit, as I recall) dude carrying a portfolio who was coming out as I was going in. Once inside, I inquired as to the identity of the man I had just passed, only to learn it was

Unpublished Aparo Phantom sketch, courtesy of Jim Main. Phantom TM & © 2006 King Features Syndicate.

Ogden Whitney. I was always hoping to run into him again so I could tell him how much I enjoyed the art he provided for a couple of NoMan stories I had written, but that simply never came to pass. In the case of Jim, I actually never really did know him, except through his art. Oh, after working together for something like three years, we did finally meet a couple of times, the first time (around about the time *Aquaman* #49 hit the stands) in the DC offices, where we both seemed a little tongue-tied. I know by then I was rather in awe of this guy (even though his shortness of stature, his bespectacled and even nerdish appearance, rather contradicted the godlike proportions my twisted mind had devised and continually built upon during those three years), and I sometimes like to think that maybe Jim felt the same way toward me. Yet, in moments of clarity, times of being a bit more honest with myself, I tend to gather unto myself approximately three thousand and twelve serious doubts about that one. Probably a far more accurate explanation for Jim's apparent sudden inability to say much of anything would have something to do with that walking talking self-absorbed giant hairball I was impersonating back in those days being more than a little intimidating, more than a tad off-putting. In any event, I do wish I had somehow been able to untie my own tongue, do wish I had at some point been able to thank Jim for all his beautiful art and mainly for simply making my silly stories (I can call them that, but you can't!) look so damn good.

© 2006 Steve Skeates

with PEN and BRUSH

by HOWARD LEROY DAVIS

Derby '73

HAVE YOU EVER TRIED TO REMEMBER what you did 33 years ago? I suspect not many of you have tried . . . I guess many of you wouldn't want to remember your time in diapers anyway. But I was hardly in diapers. I was 39 years old in November of 1973.

I was interviewing comic artists at that time in my life. I decided to reach out to some of my favorite artists during a long weekend. I had made the phone contacts and I was ready to go. My son Steve, who was eight at the time, would go along, and fellow fan Rich Greene, who had set up some of the interviews, would go along and share the driving.

In trying to reconstruct our journey from memory, I found that I could peg some times and places down easily and others remain quite vague in my memory. I'm sure that it was in November. I know that it was after the elections because I was a town councilman and quite active in politics at the time. I know that we visited Murphy Anderson on a Friday, because we went to his place of business and all of his staff was there. (If Murphy reads this and remembers working with full staff on lots of Saturdays in 1973, please don't tell me as it took long enough to work out what I'm putting down as it is.) And I know that we visited Everett Raymond Kinstler on Sunday morning, because we had picked that as the most likely time to find parking in the vicinity of his Grammercy Square home and studio in New York City.

That means to me that Rich would not have been working on Friday. And this leads me to conclude that our epic journey took place right after Thanksgiving.

A note about my work today: about 15% of my time is devoted to forensic architecture, investigating construction defect claims, slip-falls, roof problems, etc. If this narrative makes me sound a bit like a detective, in some sense that is the case.

So we left very early in the morning, the Friday after Thanksgiving 1973. We journeyed to northern New Jersey, where we stopped and interviewed Frank Thorne in his home-studio. Delightful man, who always has put himself into his work. This was immediately before his Red Sonja work was so publicly acclaimed and so he had not yet assumed his Old Wizard identity and was not yet bearded. Son Steve began a practice with the innocence of an eight-year old, which we have continued when visiting artist's studios: he picked up discarded rough sketches from Thorne's trash can and asked if he could keep them.

Leaving Thorne's a bit before lunch, we visited Murphy Anderson in his office, which was also in northern New Jersey. Murphy was producing the *P.S.* magazine for the U.S. Department of Defense at the time as well as other commercial art work. (This is the *P.S.* magazine that was originally produced by Will Eisner in the 1950s.) We saw his production facilities, met his staff, and interviewed him about his comic art career.

Late in the afternoon, we rolled into Derby, Connecticut, and entered the Charlton Comics Group plant and editorial offices. There we met Nicola (Nick) Cuti, Charlton writer and assistant editor, who gave us the tour of the editorial offices.

Nick was at that time a man who showed his Mediterranean heritage. Black hair, black mustache. Middle height; slightly more than average weight. He was a good talker and that made our time in the Charlton building all the more interesting for that.

The press room was off limits to us. Apparently the Charlton management considered the area too dangerous for visitors. The editorial offices were "just offices" . . . no particular architectural distinction to them (said I, speaking as an architect). We met George Wildman, the executive editor, Wayne Howard, bullpen artist for Charlton, and possibly Duffy Vrohland, the production manager. I say "possibly" when I mention Duffy because I know that we met him . . . but we did see him at the 1975 New York Con, and that may be the meeting with him that I remember.

I wish I could say that we had in-depth talks with each of the Charlton people that we met, but we did not. It was a nod, a smile, a "pleased to meet you," and that's about it.

We saw the paste-up area and some of the layout work. We were given unstapled, untrimmed copies of several comics so that we could see what comics looked like just as they come off the press. Steve scored the best souvenir: George Wildman sketched Popeye for the eight-year-old lad, who has the sketch in his collection to this day.

Since we arrived late in the day, most of the desks in the office area were vacant. I suspect that almost everyone had already completed their day's work and gone home. And "going home" was the next thing on our agenda.

Not to our home, for that was many, many miles away. That was not a problem, for Nick Cuti then took us to Joe Staton's house so that I could meet and interview him. The interviewing included Nick as well, because the hot property which I was interested in at the time was *E-Man* and I was delighted to have both the writer and the artist available to answer questions.

Nicola Cuti. Photo © 2006 Shannon Landano.

Joe Staton was then as he is now, for I saw him again just a couple of years ago, a pale, medium-height, slim man with glasses who tends to look what you would expect an accountant to look like. If you saw Joe on the street you would never peg him to be an artist. Talking to him, however, you quickly realize that he is not the accountant you thought he might be. Always a mischievous smile, although sometimes that smile is half hidden behind his glasses. And his words show the puckish sense of humor that he possesses.

Joe Staton. Photo © 2006 Scott Cates.

The partnership between Cuti

E-Man and Nova, from 1974's ***CPL Double-Issue*** #9 and 10 . . . ***Presents the Charlton Portfolio.*** TM & © Joe Staton.

and Staton was clear in the way that they spoke of their creation Nick did the scripts for *E-Man*, but Joe obviously loaned story ideas to the mix as well. The humor/adventure mix that they had concocted was as near to perfection as comic books get. Better than the Golden Age Plastic Man to which E-Man was often compared. Staton's art was better than Jack Cole's; Cuti's scripts provided more interesting story lines than those Cole worked from Perhaps the maturation of the comics industry should get the credit for that. By the time the E-Man stories came along in the mid-'70s, the target audience was around 20 years old, not the 10-to-12-year-olds who were the bulk of the comic readers of the '40s.

The team gave their more mature readers something to delight them in every issue. Layers upon layers of meaning characterized their work. On the simplest level, the *E-Man* art always included small sight gags. Check out any splash page and you'll see lots of them. Sometimes they were Joe's ideas, sometimes Nick's—a partnership. The drama of the art was always Joe Staton's, of course.

Not that Nick could not have provided visual drama if called upon to do so. Nick had drawn comics himself. Moonchild was his creation. While not at the professional level of Joe Staton's art, the Moonchild pages that Nick showed us had visual interest and drama. He gave us one of those pages for our collection.

That night we three visitors crashed in either Staton's or Cuti's house. I've asked Steve and Rich which place it was and they unfortunately have even less memory for such details than I do. I'm betting that we crashed at Staton's because I know that we met Joe Staton's wife, Hilarie. I remember her as most gracious by providing a good meal . . . and since I can't remember meeting any Cutis other than Nick, I'll bet she is the one who showed us to the spare bedroom.

The next morning we left, on our way to John Prentice's studio to interview him.

ALTHOUGH WE CHATTED at great length about our favorite storytelling medium that night in Connecticut, it wasn't until a few years later that I officially interviewed Joe Staton for my "With Pen and Brush" column, which appeared in the *Menemonee Falls Gazette*.

Joe had been a guest at each of the three annual conventions that our Delaware Valley Comic Consortium group presented in the Philadelphia area. We had chatted during each of those visits and kept in touch between visits.

For the displays that our group put into libraries of the South Jersey area to amaze and amuse, Joe prepared for us a display page showing four panels in various stages of completion. The top left panel showed the pencils as Joe would do them if he knew that he was going to ink the page. The top right panel showed the way that the panel would look if it were going to be inked by others. The bottom left panel showed the panel bordered and with lettering. The bottom right showed the completed, inked panel. (The character shown on that page was Primus, which Joe was doing at the time.)

The display panel was the main feature of the exhibit, but we also put the unstapled, hot-off-the-press pages we had received during our Charlton visit, some cover proofs, and some completed art pages into the exhibit if the library would give us enough space to display it all.

Joe Staton was actually working for DC when I made that long-intended interview. The "With Pen and Brush" interviews focused upon technique. Only a few comments about technique differentiated Joe Staton from the others I had interviewed about how they created their comic art.

He laid his artwork directly upon the illustration board using a 6H pencil. We in architecture refer to a pencil with lead that hard as a "nail." Awestruck that he should use such a pencil rather than the 2B pencils that many of his colleagues used, I asked why. Joe answered, "I don't have to sharpen it as often." True, of course.

The second comment from Joe that came out of that interview that stuck in my mind had to do with characterization. Someone else sitting in on the interview—maybe my son Steve—asked how he was able to draw a character again and again and always make the character look the same. Staton said, "Making them look the same is easy once you are trained into your own style. Making different characters look different is the challenge." At the time, Joe was drawing *Justice League of America*. He went on to describe how he had to set hairlines, subtle differences in the location of the eyes and mouth within the head, and the other aspects of drawing heads to make sure that Batman, Superman, and the Martian Manhunter looked different.

Joe was on my list of favorite artists right from the start and still is on that list today. As one of the most prolific of comic artists, his work is relatively easy for an art collector to add to his collection at a reasonable cost. Having said that, however, there is one piece of Staton art I have in my personal collection that I value so highly I doubt anyone will ever come up with the money to woo it away from me. It is a page from "The Gods of Mount Olympus," which Joe did with John Ostrander. It is the page where a semiclad Pandora, prompted by her curiosity, opens the box. . . .

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The Division Street Ramble

Editor's Notes & Readers' Letters

Charlton News & Reviews

Michael Ambrose, *Editor*

Charlton Spotlight (formerly *My Li'l Gunmaster*) Vol 1, No 5 • Fall 2006 • "*Charlton Spotlight* gives you more!"

FANTASTIC GIANTS

My guess is that you're reading this magazine because you fondly remember the Charlton Comics of your youth and you're curious about their creators. (That's why I started publishing *Spotlight*, anyway.) If so, you'd probably agree with me that two of the biggest reasons we still read and enjoy Charltons—maybe the only reasons worth having—go by the names of **Joe Gill** and **Steve Ditko.**

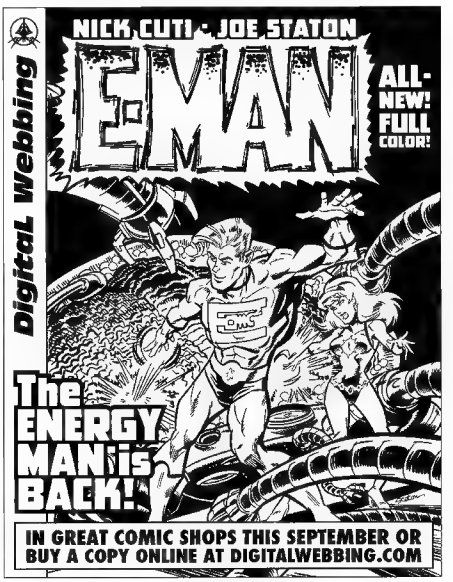
Both men were incredibly creative and prolific. Both began working for Charlton early in the company's existence (Ditko, 1954; Gill, 1955) and were still working for them in its final days in the mid-1980s. Both worked across nearly all comics genres at Charlton—superhero, weird & SF, war, western, adventure, romance, funny animal (well, in that area Gill gets the best of Ditko; the latter, as far as I know, never did any animated or kid's books for Charlton). During most of the 1970s, virtually the only place you could find new Ditko art was in the pages of Charlton's ghost comics. He was represented in just about every single one of the hundreds that Charlton published. And most of those stories were written by Joe Gill.

Individually and teamed together, Gill and Ditko gave us characters we still remember to this day, some of which are even still being published—Captain Atom, Blue Beetle, the Question, Peacemaker, and Nightshade, to name just a few. But those were the high-profile characters. Along the way, over those 30 years at Charlton, Gill and Ditko also collaborated on hundreds of individual stories, long and short, for Charlton's anthology titles in the genres enumerated above, with characters who existed for a brief few pages only but were nevertheless made memorable by the skills of their creators. My own personal favorites are the odd, fanciful, creepy little stories they did together in the ghost and SF books, like *This Magazine Is Haunted, Tales of the Mysterious Traveler, Out of This World, Space Adventures, The Many Ghosts of Doctor Graves, Haunted,* and all the others. The "action-hero" tales of Gill and Ditko are works for the masses; those strange little anthology stories they did are for the discerning aficionado. All of them are for the ages.

It's high time their contributions to that slice of pop culture that is Charlton Comics were put under the spotlight in these pages, and I'm happy to offer this "Fantastic Giants" special look at two of my favorite creators I hope you have as much fun with the issue as I've had putting it together. Never before has Joe Gill talked so broadly, candidly, and at such length about his career, and I think it's safe to say that Jim's extended conversation with Joe this issue will come to be considered the definitive Joe Gill interview. Once again, my thanks to all involved in the preparation of this issue, especially to Joe for his patience in waiting for it to appear an entire year after the interview was conducted. But that's the publishing biz. . . .

SPEAKING OF memorable Charlton characters, there's big **E-Man** news lately. First, go check out my interview with Nick Cuti and Joe Staton in TwoMorrows' ***BACK ISSUE*** #13 (Dec. 2005; **www.twomorrows.com**). In those pages, Nick and Joe stated that they'd gladly do new a new *E-Man* comic if only they had a publisher interested in having them do it. Well, somebody was listening, and the good folks at Digital Webbing will have a new **E-Man one-shot** in the shops in September 2006, right about the same time this issue of *Charlton Spotlight* gets there. Take a look at the ad on this page, then proceed to the DW Web site at **www.digitalwebbing.com** for more information. Better yet, hotfoot it down to your local comics shop right now and buy a copy or three! Let's see if we can't make this an ongoing series again, shall we?

SPOTLIGHT'S able European correspondent and contributing editor Ramon Schenk has been blogging about Charlton for the past few months. If you can't get enough Charlton discussion (and who can?), go check it out: **http://360.yahoo.com/ramonschenk**. While you're online, head over to Jon B. Knutson's blog at **waffyjon.blogspot.com**, then take a look at some fun Jon's been having with creating alternate-reality Charlton


Digital Webbing
NICK CUTI • JOE STATON
E-MAN
ALL-NEW! FULL COLOR!
The ENERGY MAN is BACK!
IN GREAT COMIC SHOPS THIS SEPTEMBER OR BUY A COPY ONLINE AT DIGITALWEBBING.COM

Comics covers from the '60s, at **www.worldfamouscomics.com/coverstories/back20060625.shtml** and **http://www.worldfamouscomics.com/coverstories/back20060730.shtml**.

ERRATA: Gary Brown informs me that the T-bolt illustration by PAM on page 9 in *Spotlight* #4, which I credited original publication for in *Charlton Bullseye* #3, was instead first published in Gary's zine **Gremlin** #2 (Dec. 1970).

IN MEMORIAM

It's our continuing sad duty to report in these pages the passing of those comics pros who, at one time or another, passed through Charlton's halls:

Jim Aparo, Aug 1932–July 19, 2005. Aparo trained at the Hartford Art School but was largely a self-taught illustrator. Working at an ad agency in the early 1960s, with writer Ralph Kanna he created newspaper adventure strip *Stern Wheeler,* published briefly (and for free) in the Hartford [CT] *Times*. Aparo, a lifelong comics fan, broke into the pro ranks at Charlton in 1967, working for Dick Giordano on sexy teen strip "Miss Bikini Luv" in *Go-Go* and quickly rose to the top with covers and features for Charlton's western, war, weird, and romance titles, including fine work on the Phantom, Wander (with Denny O'Neil), Nightshade, and Tiffany Sinn. Aparo followed Giordano to DC in 1968 to begin his major career, drawing the Phantom Stranger, Aquaman, the Spectre, and Batman, including a long run on *The Brave & the Bold*. Aparo was a meticulous artist and always penciled, lettered and inked his own work, one page a day, for decades.

Bud Blake, born Julian W. Blake, Feb. 13, 1918–Dec. 27, 2005. Blake created the wonderful and long-running newspaper "Tiger" strip, published as a comic book by Charlton for six issues, 1970–71, though his original contribution to the book consisted of a single cover only. *Hogan's Alley* #13 carried a nice interview with Blake.

William Fraccio, July 9, 1920–Dec. 7, 2005. Fraccio usually teamed with Tony Tallarico on his Charlton war, western, and superhero work and was half of "Tony Williamsune" in Warren's *Creepy* and *Eerie* magazines. See *Alter Ego* #29 for a fine interview with Fraccio by Jim Amash.

George Kashdan, May 17, 1928–June 3, 2006. Long-time DC scripter Kashdan also wrote briefly for Charlton's *Stck* magazine, 1977–80.

Owen McCarron, Mar. 25, 1929–June 27, 2005. Canadian McCarron did war and SF stories for Charlton in the early 1960s but had a career that extended for many years to Marvel and other publishers.

Mickey Spillane, born Frank Morrison Spillane, Mar. 9, 1918–July 18, 2006. Spillane was one of the best-selling, and one of the most publicly recognizable, writers of all time, beginning with his first Mike Hammer novel in 1947. He also wrote for comics and pulps from the 1930s on and got Joe Gill started writing comics.

Alex Toth, June 25, 1928–May 27, 2006. Toth was widely known as the comics "artist's artist." His contributions to Charlton Comics are but two in number: a page of gag panels at the dawn of his career in *Yellowjacket Comics* #7, Jan. 1946, and a romance story in *My Only Love* #3, Nov. 1975—plus a painted cover for *Real West* v16, #114, Apr. 1973.

ABOUT OUR CONTRIBUTORS

Jim Amash is associate editor of **Alter Ego** and a champion interviewer of Golden Age comic book artists. Jim is also a working comics artist, having put in time at all the majors, and is now a longtime inker at Archie.

Mark Burbey has written comics for Dark Horse, Fantagraphics, Caliber, and Comico, and he's written about comics for *Comic Art, Charlton Spotlight, The Warren Companion, Comic Book Marketplace, The Comics Journal, The Comics Buyer's Guide, Comics Interview, Amazing Heroes, Rocket's Blast-Comicollector*, and *Reflex* magazine. He has also written about music and film for *Filmfax, Alternative Press, Magnet*, and *Jazziz*, and collectibles for *Baby Boomer Collectibles* and *Toy Trader*. You can read his blog at **markburbey.blogspot.com** and contact him at **markburbey@earthlink.net.**

Nicola Cuti assisted Wally Wood before becoming assistant editor of the Charlton Comics line under George Wildman through the mid-1970s. He co-created E-Man with Joe Staton and wrote many of the classic stories that appeared in Charlton's various fantasy titles. Nick continues to collaborate with Staton on new E-Man and Mike Mauser stories both in print and on the Web, has worked in film animation in Hollywood, and is an independent filmmaker and producer. Current projects include SF film *Grub* and a Captain Cosmos TV feature, both now in production, and a new E-Man series now out from Digital Webbing.

Howard Leroy Davis was born in 1934 and read the Golden Age comics when they were new. About 1950 he discovered science fiction...and girls. That took him away from comics until his mother began giving comics to his children about 1967. Then he caught the bug and became a "panelologist" (the term that Jerry Bails thought would be a good name for the comic book hobbyist). Since then he has been in fandom contributing articles and collecting both comic books and comic art...and grandchildren (of which he now has 14).

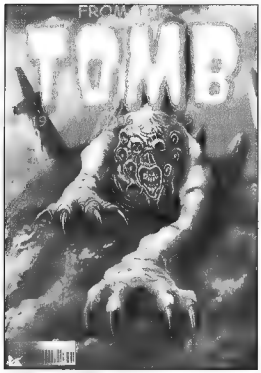
Ron Frantz's Charlton memories appear here regularly. Ron is the author of *Fandom: Confidential,* a critically acclaimed historical documentary of fandom (see ad in Ron's article). Currently he is putting the finishing touches to a pulp history book. Contact Ron at **midguard20@aol.com.**

Gene Phillips is a freelance writer who has made his home for many years in Houston, Texas. Besides this magazine, Gene has recently appeared in ***BACK ISSUE***.

Ramon Schenk, our intrepid European correspondent, does social work with the criminally insane in his native Netherlands and researches Charlton Comics on the side. Hmmm...wonder if there's a connection?

Steve Skeates broke into comics at Marvel, Charlton, and DC in the mid-1960s and wrote a slough of tales for Warren in the 1970s. At Charlton he scripted *Abbott & Costello*, Steve Ditko's Question stories, and many westerns and weird tales for Jim Aparo and other artists.

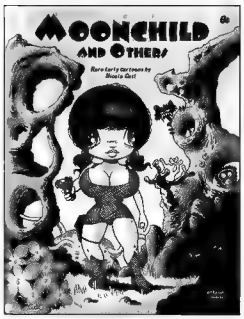
'Doh! What have Matt Groening, Batton Lash &
Michael T. Gilbert wrought?! © 2005 Bongo Entertainment, Inc.



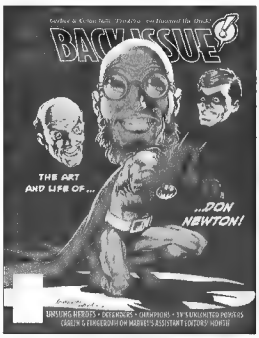
NEW AND NOTED

You must not miss ***From the Tomb* #19 (May 2006)**, Peter Normanton, ed., 619 Whitworth Rd., Lower Healey, Rochdale, Lancs., UK OL12 0TB, **Peter.Normanton@btinternet.com, www.fromthetomb.co.uk**; 3x/year, £3.95, $5.95, 3/£19 (world). *FTT* continues to amaze, with superlative production (including many color interior pages) and clockwork regularity. #19 has extensive Charlton coverage with an in-depth article on Pete (PAM) Morisi by Frank Motler, including a PAM art index 1949-57, and part 2 of Motler & Garriock's exclusive Alan Class interview—among so many other goodies. While you're at it, get #18 with its classically horrific Tom Sutton Charlton cover and editor Normanton's 10-page examination of Sutton's Charlton period, in full color.

***Spooky, the Warren Fanzine*,** Piers Casimir, 2 The Broadway, Gustard Wood, Wheathampstead, Herts. AL4 8LN UK, **piers@spookyfanzine.com, www.spookyfanzine.com**, 3 times/year, £3.50, $4.95 (plus S&H). #8 is just out, with Mike Royer, Don Glut & Nick Cuti interviews and features on Frank Frazetta and Trina Robbins, among many other neat things. *Spooky* is the best Warren fanzine I've ever seen and is in great need of your subscription support, having just lost its contract with Diamond Distributors. Get it now!



Moonchild and Others: Rare Early Cartoons by Nicola Cuti, ed. by Walt Wentz, Omega Room Press, 32 pp. & stiff color covers, B/W text, $6 & $2 S&H from Walt Wentz, 1817 17th Ave., Forest Grove, OR 97116, **waltw@teleport.com**. New book of Nick Cuti cartoons from the early days of Moonchild (1966) to the late 70s, reproducing very rare old stuff, including Cuti's first published cartoon, the self-published *Moonchild* #1-3 from 1968-70, and much early fanzine and con program work. The most comprehensive collection of its kind and backed by solid scholarship. What are you waiting for?



***BACK ISSUE* #19 (Dec. 2006),** 100 pages, $6.95, from TwoMorrows, focuses on the career of artist **Don Newton** (*Batman*, *Shazam!*, *The Phantom*), with classic and unpublished comics and fanzine art—as well as many more of the kind of fantastic features that have come to distinguish Mike Eury's fine magazine. No Charlton fan will want to miss this new issue!

READERS SPOTLIGHT

Write to us! P.O Box 4201, Austin, TX 78765-4201, **charspot01@austin.rr.com**.

Johnny Ace
Johnny Ace Studios / www.acekustoms.com
We greatly enjoyed the Tom Sutton issue of *Charlton Spotlight* and wish we had known about your publication before this year. We had the pleasure of knowing Tom (via long-distance) and enjoyed many, many hours of stories, anecdotes, advice, and opinions for a time from the late '80s to the mid-'90s.

Darkhorse Comics/Books is publishing our book, *Workshop of Filthy Creation—The Art of Johnny Ace & Kali Verra*. While the majority of this collection will consist of work we did for Ed "Big Daddy" Roth over the years, there will be many examples of comics and music posters done by us that were greatly influenced by Tom. We plan to pay tribute to Tom in our book by explaining how his friendship and talent continues to inspire us.

One aspect of our many conversations into the late nights continues to hold a special place—Tom had a great curiosity about the "Rat Fink" type work we were doing, and of course, the subjects of Wood's work and H.P. Lovecraft came up every time. Class act that he was, Tom always made us feel as fellow artists working in the same league—as equals, sharing battle stories. There are many of these we would have been honored to share for your Sutton tribute issue had we but known.

On one final note of interest, it was Kim Thompson at *Amazing Heroes* who initially put us in contact with Tom, who gave us a call out of the blue. Tom casually asked if we had ever met Steve Fiorilla, another friend of his, who had done some work for Ed Roth also. Almost instantly, we had any number of subjects of conversation to run up each other's phone bills with!

Michael T. Gilbert
Congratulations on the latest *Charlton Spotlight*. It's a great issue, possibly the best one yet. I was particularly happy to see the spotlight on Pete Morisi, a greatly under-appreciated cartoonist.

I recall buying his T-Bolt comics when I was a teenager in the mid-'60s and being impressed with his understated intelligence. The art wasn't nearly as flashy and dynamic as my other favorites at the time (Ditko, Kirby and Eisner), but there was a quiet authority to his work. The scripts were thoughtful, and you got the impression that this PAM guy really cared about his character. Clearly, it was more than just a paycheck. I can't honestly say he was ever one of my favorite artists, as his art was a bit too static for my young tastes. But even then I admired his sense of design, which worked perfectly with his story.

I can also recall being intrigued by the mystery around the PAM signature, and the fact that the artist didn't want his real name revealed (because he was moonlighting from his real job as a cop). At one point I thought the mystery artist might be Pat Masulli, who drew art for Charlton's version of Tarzan, even though there was no real similarity between their styles. But at some point I picked up some old 1950s comics with his signed art and figured out who PAM really was.

Mike W. Barr
I am an irregular reader of *Charlton Spotlight*, depending on the subject matter, but gobbled up the much-appreciated issue #4 on Pete Morisi.

As a fan, I loved Pete's *Thunderbolt*, which I discovered with its third issue in 1966. (I even repainted an Aurora Superman model

kit to make a T-Bolt model and, years later, submitted a short T-Bolt script to the old *Charlton Bullseye* as a contest submission. I was disqualified because I had already made a couple of pro sales.) Later, as a pro comics writer, I corresponded with Pete, met him once or twice, was narrowly beaten out for the post of writer on DC's revived *Thunderbolt* title, and later collaborated, albeit very briefly, with Pete on the Thunderbolt page for DC's *Who's Who*. (I later asked Pete if I could buy that page from him. He demurred, saying it was the only T-Bolt art he had generated that had actually seen print at DC, logic I could not refute. Days later, an original, hand-colored T-Bolt drawing arrived on my birthday, though Pete was unaware of that. Tabu would probably deny it was a coincidence.)

However, your writers were too hard on Michael Collins, who wrote and penciled the revived *Thunderbolt* series at DC. Having spoken with Michael about T-Bolt many times, I can say with assurance that he is an avid T-Bolt/Morisi fan, and gave the strip his absolute best efforts. Since not even my harshest critics have ever accused me of being shy, I do think the series might have been a tad better if I had written it and Mike drawn it, or if Mike and I had co-plotted it, as I liked many of his ideas, but that's not for us to know. We talked about collaborating on a T-Bolt special project—perhaps an Annual or a one-shot—but that never happened, either. (This was long before we knew of Pete's attempts to get the rights to T-Bolt back, of course.)

I am proud of being the only writer to have collaborated with Pete on T-Bolt, even if only for one page, as well as for my use of the character in *DC Challenge* #7, on which Dave Gibbons did excellent work. Pete later told me he was very pleased with my use of Peter Cannon and Tabu in that story, saying I had done a better job with the character than had any of the fill-in writers at Charlton, none of whose T-Bolt stories he much liked. My heels didn't touch ground for days.

I have no idea if Pete's estate has any interest in reviving T-Bolt. If so, I would be thrilled to be involved.

My last few letters to and from Pete involved writing. He asked me many questions about my own methods of plotting, and was fascinated when I dissected in detail one of my best Batman stories for him (*Detective Comics* #571, "Fear for $ale"). As a writer he was more intuitive than analytical, and was interested in discussing structure and pacing. I learned so much from his stories that I was delighted to be able to repay even a small portion of the monumental debt I owe him.

—— • ——

Rick Kelsey

I just finished reading *Charlton Spotlight* #1 and thoroughly enjoyed it. My first exposure to Pat Boyette occurred in the 1970s when I discovered some old issues of *Thunderbolt* at a flea market. Thunderbolt as done by PAM appealed to me. There was one issue in which Thunderbolt rescued a young girl and in so doing became her guardian at the end of the issue. Eager to find out what happened next, I searched other flea markets for the next issue. I found it but was disappointed to discover that PAM had left the comic and that storyline was abandoned. Instead, the comic was now being done by Pat Boyette. Angry that PAM had been "replaced" I had very little regard for Boyette's work.

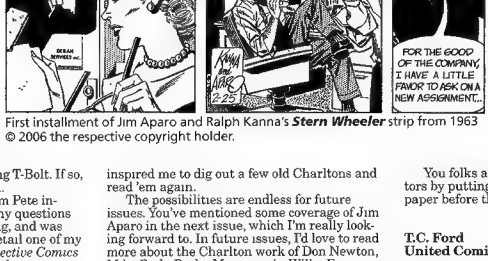
Later, I discovered Boyette again in issue of the *Phantom*. Being a dumb teenager, I still had little regard for his work. Hey, like a lot of comic collectors for the day, I was more into superheroes and Marvel and DC. It was until much later that I came to have more respect for his work. And now, having read the first issue of your great magazine, I have a great deal of respect and admiration for his work. It's really amazing to consider how this man did so much with so little time and for so little reward. I have a part-time job and in my off-hours work on freelance writing. So I can certainly appreciate Boyette's willingness to work for Charlton's low pay rates because of the fact that they paid quickly and regularly. When you're in the freelance business, the promise of a regular and timely check can mean a lot!

Your first issue was *great*! It was not only enjoyable but also an eye-opening experience. Thank you! I have the other issues of your magazine and I'm looking forward to reading those next. I also cannot wait to get to the issue on the mysterious PAM (well, that's how I always thought of that guy since I never saw a name for that artist/writer!).

—— • ——

Mark Reznicek

Just a quick note to let you know how much I'm enjoying the *Charlton Spotlight* package I ordered from you. I've already read the first two issues and I'm just digging into the Tom Sutton issue. Each issue is even better than the previous one. And the extra goodies in the package were cool, too. Lots of fun and it even inspired me to dig out a few old Charltons and read 'em again.


GET STERN WHEELER IN MY OFFICE!
SEABA SERVICES INC.
FOR YOU BOSS MAN! SOUNDS LIKE THE BIG MAN HOLLERING FOR HIS UNDERCOVER AGENT!
KANNA and ARO
2-25
FOR THE GOOD OF THE COMPANY, I HAVE A LITTLE FAVOR TO ASK ON A NEW ASSIGNMENT...
First installment of Jim Aparo and Ralph Kanna's ***Stern Wheeler*** strip from 1963
© 2006 the respective copyright holder.

The possibilities are endless for future issues. You've mentioned some coverage of Jim Aparo in the next issue, which I'm really looking forward to. In future issues, I'd love to read more about the Charlton work of Don Newton, Mike Zeck, Rocke Mastroserio, Willie Franz, Joe Gill, Nicola Cuti, the early John Byrne stuff...heck, I'll end up naming them all if I don't stop! As long as you keep publishing, I'll keep buyin' 'em.

—— • ——

Sam de la Rosa

"Working" with Pat consisted of him letting me ink (I was 16) a panel here and there including a two-page war text feature (I recall a scene with a kid in the jungle with vines in a *Phantom* book but I'd have to see it again—I gave my entire 'bout 150 comics collection of Pat Boyette Charlton comics to Pat in the early '80s when he helped me ink *Star Wars* for Marvel, backgrounds for *Dreadstar*, some indy pages over Gammill. Before that he wrote a one-page story for me over the phone instantaneously as I described the already-drawn visuals, it appeared in an issue of the fanzine *Fantasy Crossroads*. In the late '70s and up to '82 I worked for Impact Productions (contract co. based inside of Lackland AFB) which Pat co-owned with Fred Himes (another Charlton artist in San Antonio) & another person I believe (they also did color seps for Charlton). Pat's wife, Betty, filled in blacks on many stories and erased pages in her spare time. Himes helped pencil (a *Thunderbolt* comes to mind among others) a few early stories for Charlton and got in that way doing stuff on his own. One time Fred and his teenage son Michael helped Pat on a *Six-Million Dollar Man* comic (the one where Steve has SIX fingers—an artistic goof not noticed due to the speed that they were doing it along with the short deadline). I spent hours every week for years visiting and talking to Pat on many a subject. If I could just remember it all. My son is named after him (Aaron) and needless to say Pat made a huge impact on my life to this day. I'm currently inking a *Phantom* comic for Moonstone and Pat is still an inspiration.

—— • ——

Tim Tresslar

The first four issues of *Charlton Spotlight* were great! They arrived, along with the Pete Morisi reproduction, just as I went on vacation. Needless to say, I spent a good deal of that week with my nose planted firmly in those mags. The Pat Boyette and Tom Sutton retrospectives were great. I had no idea Mr. Boyette had been such a colorful character in real life. My appreciation for his work deepened after I read the profiles and tributes to him. It's interesting. I never was a fan of his Marvel work (*Star Lord*, etc.), but I really like his Charlton stuff (natch). It still looks good after all these years. I'm reasonably sure I'd enjoy his Warren creations, too. Actually I didn't realize either Boyette or Sutton drew for Warren until I read your mag. I had a couple of Warren books that included Nicola Cuti but was otherwise unaware other Charltonites had created for them. Archie Goodwin and Frank Frazetta were the guys I usually associated with Warren.

I can't wait to hear more about Joe Gill in issue 5. Gill's ability to crank in so many genres just knocks me out. And Beetle and Capt. Atom always have been favorites of mine. I'm really bummed that DC elected to kill Ted Kord/Blue Beetle. Though with comics that always can change.

You folks are doing a real service to collectors by putting all this information down on paper before the folks who lived it are gone.

—— • ——

T.C. Ford
United Comics / www.unitedcomicworks.com

You may remember me from Charlton (1986) days. My name is T.C. (the "T" stands for Tye, not Ty) Ford. Someone today just sent me a copy of *Charlton Spotlight* #4, featuring Tom (at the time at was Thom) Christopher's recollections of his time at Charlton. I must, however, disagree somewhat with his perception of the circumstances surrounding my involvement with that organization.

(1) I had a contract with Charlton to produce the material I solicited for. It was an agreement not unlike many in the early days of comics, or later when Jim Lee and Rob Liefeld (or Joe Quesada with Marvel Knights) produced material for Marvel outside the bullpen. I was to package the material for Charlton, acting as editor of the line. The money came from percentage of sales. I made page rates based on what we estimated sales would be, the reason payment was upon publication. He knew this, because it was explained to everybody. I was not a "guy who hung out [at Charlton] a little," which would make no sense, since I had no car and lived several towns (35 minutes by car) away...the reason I worked out of my home office. My position with Charlton was contracted. I DID NOT "CON" ANYONE. Things ended

when I felt I could no longer maintain control over the characters, which were being sold off under my nose without my direct knowledge.

(2) It has always been my intent to publish the material in my possession (AND of course, to pay upon publication as was the original agreement), since my Charlton contract gave me permission to do so. Because Roger Broughton (a Canadian businessman) bought the character rights to the remainder of Charlton after my departure, the character names have been altered. The material will see publication later this year under my United Comics banner. We have already published some other non-Charlton material, which is available at our United Comics website.

(3) As to the "it might've worked"...I maintain that it would've worked. The distributors loved my pitch to them, and the media at the time were very interested. There were just too many behind the scenes things that I didn't bring up to everybody at the time that made things an uphill battle. I fought the good fight, and I gave up at the end. If history (or rather, Tom's recollection) wants to blame things on me, that's fine.

I have plans to republish the *Bullseye Special*, and I will as part of my Shockwave series, but it will probably be in the fall (it's been delayed more than a few times, but *will* see print) That will contain an account of some of my Charlton experience, expanded on from what I wrote in *Comic Book Artist* magazine. When that finally appears, I would love to do a more in-depth piece for you in the future Despite what Tom may believe, I was not a "charlatan at Charlton." I flat-out explained the situation to anyone interested in doing work for the projects. That it didn't work out was disappointing, and I know that as the point man I have to accept the digs and pokes, so...

I just felt that I needed to try to clarify some things and clear the air. You have a good magazine. Keep it up, I'll be watching!

—— • ——

Ron Fortier
www/airship27.com
I just had to write a few words about how much I truly enjoyed *Charlton Spotlight* #4. Your coverage of Pete Morisi was both entertaining and informative. I was always a big fan of Peter Cannon—Thunderbolt and Johnny Dynamite and so it was great to learn more about the man who invented these great strips. The articles seemed to go beyond just facts and allow us a human glimpse into the man, his life and his dedication to his art. This is what *CS* does best. Here's hoping someday, somebody publishes those unseen strips. Keep 'em coming.

—— • ——

Robin Snyder
The Comics
I am still reading and enjoying and learning from your salute to Pete Morisi. You do top yourself when it comes to the matter of the tribute. Wouldn't Pete have been surprised and pleased with this issue. I especially appreciate your use of large and/or full page pieces of artwork. This adds to the positive picture depicted by the prose.

—— • ——

Steve Fiorilla
CS #4 is the perfect ode to "PAM." Felt like I lived his life with him! Totally absorbing to say the least. I'm sure I'm not the first to tell you that *CS* gets better with each issue. Frantz is a good writer and really shows what it's like to befriend someone you admire.

—— • ——

Jon B. Knutson
As usual, this was another stellar effort! I appreciated the in-depth look at Pete Morisi, whom I've long been curious about It's always fascinating to me to read about the life of some of my favorite writers and artists had outside of comics, and you definitely provided that! I only have one minor "complaint"...not enough *Vengeance Squad!* I believe that was the first Charlton title that I really saw PAM's work in, and it'll always be a favorite of mine

—— • ——

Harry O. Morris
Thanks for *Charlton Spotlight* #4. It's a great issue Especially liked the full color cover by Pete Morisi. I've been going back to basics myself and doing a lot of figure drawing. As a result, I have a newfound appreciation for comics artists like Morisi, who can say so much visually with such an economy of line. Denis Tiani's article on Charlton's (oops—I almost wrote "Charlatan"!) horror magazines really brought back memories. I have kept a nearly complete set of both titles myself all these years. My only regret—and source of puzzlement—is why I held onto these through thick & thin while somehow letting my early run of *Spider Man* evaporate into who-knows-where. I did order a few things from the back pages of *Horror/Mad Monsters*—but they, too, have vanished.

—— • ——

Michael Seher
CharSpot 4 received! Great job, Mike! An excellent mix of pros/fans/family included as contributors, and I loved the mini-comic! Very good story/art containing characterization/humanity, which is a positive example of comics being more than just a throwaway, childish medium. Terry Austin's letter was dead on stating that "real cartoonists are a finite resource, a dwindling breed."

—— • ——

Bill Pearson
Congratulations on producing your best issue to date. Good covers (for a change) and really beautifully designed interior pages. I'm very impressed with all the type runarounds and well balanced page designs. As you know, I've been critical of some of your layouts in past issues, and thought that was not your strength as an editor, but you've proven yourself very capable with this issue. I've just flipped through it, trying to find *something* to criticize, just to prove I'm still the same fussbudget I've always been, but just can't find anything! Well, I did have one misgiving, after reading the first three articles. Your article was excellent, and properly the lead article, but my little piece was just an abstract little commentary, and should have been toward the back of the book. This isn't false modesty, it's just that it wasn't really very complimentary to Morisi, and the more personal stories about working with him and the details of his career should have preceded it. But I'm well aware of page placement complications, and realize that as a one-pager, you could put it in wherever it would fit.

—— • ——

Walt Wentz
Got *CS* #4 this aft, and must say, it is visually much superior to the last one! The cover particularly is grabby and much more accessible, and the stacked contents easy to peruse. The interior is a nice mix of text and pix, good active layouts, but nothing so over-fancy as to interrupt the flow of the text. In fact, about the only thing that wasn't always good was the treatment of some grays.

Migawd! There's a tremendous amount of info on one man presented, kaleidoscope-fashion, through many eyes. After this chance to see PAM's early work, I'm much more impressed with his skill and versatility. ..the only things I'd seen up to now were in his thick-lined, heavily shadowed, static Charlton style. But obviously he could swash buckles and strike superheroic poses with the best of them. And, now that so many people mention it, the cinematic influence in his work is very obvious, just as in the work of Osamu Tezuka—although Morisi obviously went more for the intense close-ups than for the long shots. Although a very modest and assuming character, obviously he was widely talented.

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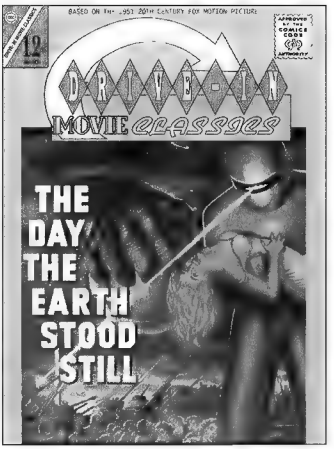
BASED ON THE 1957 20TH CENTURY FOX MOTION PICTURE
12
APPROVED BY THE COMICS CODE AUTHORITY
DRIVE-IN
MOVIE CLASSICS
THE DAY THE EARTH STOOD STILL
A Charlton comic that never was, by **Jon B. Knutson.**
© 2006 the respective copyright holder.

Mike Benton
Wow, what a great issue! The best yet and just the type I love—a full in-depth treatment of an underappreciated artist who worked in my favorite Charlton era of comics. This zine is so good it is going to inspire more Charlton and Morisi collectors and that just makes my life harder, but I will take the bad with the good in this case!

—— • ——

Val Morisi
What a terrific book! The "look" and the layout is outstanding. I just purchased *The Art of George Tuska* from TwoMorrows and it's not near as inviting as your book. Of course, I guess I'm a little biased. The "Strangler on the Loose" reprint is stunning. I really like my father's work in black and white...it's the way I remember the originals he was working on when I was growing up. I spoke to Russ today and he's just as thrilled with the issue as I am.

—— • ——

Batton Lash
www.ExhibitAPress.com
I just returned from a weeklong trip in New York, so I'm up to my ears in deadlines, delinquent with outstanding assignments, correspondence, chores, etc., etc. There's no time for dallying...so what do I find in the mail when I arrived home? The fourth issue of *Charlton Spotlight*. The *best* one yet, too! A whole issue devoted to the great Pete Morisi? I'm so there! I have to drop everything and dig in. Lots of good stuff exploring the life and career of a little-known comics great. Gives new meaning to the term "New York's Finest!" *CS* has come a long way since its first issue, maintaining its fine production values by kicking it up a notch with crisp layout and plenty of sharp graphics illustrating articles. But...but...the issue's so informative and chock full of little gems of unexplored comics history, I can't put it down until I finish. Damn you, Mike Ambrose! I've got a million things to do!

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Charlton Comics Checklist: Year by Year *Part 4:* 1963–1966

Compiled by Dan Stevenson, with assistance from Mike Tiefenbacher; edited by Michael Ambrose • © 2006 Dan Stevenson • All cover images © Charlton Comics Group

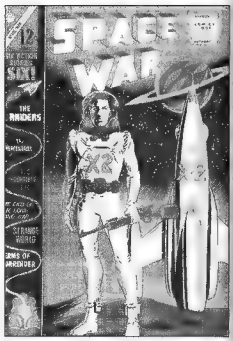
Year, Title, Issues Published, and Total Number of Comics Published per Year

1963

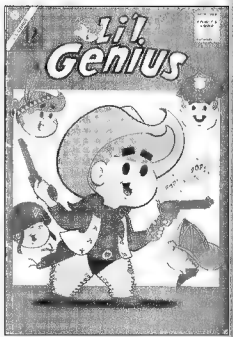
Army War Heroes 1 (12/63)	1
Atomic Mouse 52 (2/63) – 54 (6/63)	3
Attack 2 (Sum 63)	1
Battlefield Action 45 (1/63) – 50 (11/63)	6
Billy the Kid 38 (2/63) – 43 (12/63)	6
Black Fury 40 (2/63) – 45 (12/63)	6
Brides in Love 34 (2/63) – 39 (12/63)	6
Cheyenne Kid 38 (2/63) – 43 (12/63)	6
Confidential Diary 16 (1/63) – 17 (3/63)	2
Cynthia Doyle, Nurse in Love 68 (2/63) – 73 (12/63)	6
D-Day 1 (Sum 63)	1
Doctor Tom Brent, Young Intern 1 (2/63) – 5 (10/63)	5
Drag-Strip Hotrodders 1 (Sum 63)	1
Emergency Doctor 1 (Sum 63)	1
Fightin' Air Force 36 (1/63) – 41 (11/63)	6
Fightin' Army 50 (1/63) – 55 (11/63)	6
Fightin' Marines 51 (2/63) – 56 (12/63)	6
Fightin' Navy 108 (2/63) – 113 (12/63)	6
First Kiss 30 (2/63) – 35 (12/63)	6
Freddy 38 (2/63) – 43 (12/63)	6
Gorgo 11 (2/63) – 16 (12/63)	6
Hot Rods and Racing Cars 61 (1/63) – 66 (11/63)	6
Hunk 9 (1/63) – 11 (5/63)	3
I Love You 44 (2/63) 49 (12/63)	6
Just Married 29 (2/63) – 34 (12/63)	6
Kid Montana 38 (1/63) – 43 (11/63)	6
Konga 10 (1/63) 15 (11/63)	6
Konga's Revenge 2 (Sum 63)	1
Li'l Genius 42 (1/63) – 47 (11/63)	6
Love Diary 25 (1/63) – 30 (11/63)	6
My Little Margie 45 (1/63) – 50 (11/63)	6
Mysteries of Unexplored Worlds 34 (2/63) – 39 (12/63)	6
Nurse Betsy Crane 20 (1/63) 25 (11/63)	6
Outlaws of the West 41 (2/63) – 46 (12/63)	6
Registered Nurse 1 (Sum 63)	1
Reptisaurus Special Edition 1 (Sum 63)	1
Return of Gorgo, The 2 (Sum 63)	1
Romantic Secrets 42 (1/63) – 47 (11/63)	6
Romantic Story 64 (1/63) 69 (11/63)	6
Secrets of Young Brides 35 (2/63) – 40 (12/63)	6
Six-Gun Heroes 72 (1/63) – 77 (11/63)	6
Space Adventures 49 (1/63) – 54 (11/63)	6
Space War 20 (1/63) – 25 (11/63)	6
Strange Suspense Stories 63 (2/63) – 68 (12/63)	6
Submarine Attack 37 (1/63) – 42 (11/63)	6
Sue and Sally Smith 49 (1/63) – 54 (11/63)	6
Sweethearts 69 (1/63) 74 (11/63)	6
Teen-Age Confidential Confessions 16 (2/63) – 21 (12/63)	6
Teenage Hotrodders 1 (4/63) 5 (12/63)	5
Teen-Age Love 30 (2/63) – 35 (12/63)	6
Teen Confessions 21 (2/63) – 26 (12/63)	6
Texas Rangers in Action 37 (1/63) – 42 (11/63)	6
Three Nurses 18 (5/63) – 21 (11/63)	4
Timmy, the Timid Ghost 36 (1/63) 41 (11/63)	6
Unusual Tales 37 (1/63) – 42 (11/63)	6
U.S. Air Force Comics 25 (1/63) – 30 (11/63)	6
War Heroes 1 (2/63) – 6 (12/63)	6
Wyatt Earp, Frontier Marshall 46 (2/63) 51 (12/63)	6
Young Doctors 1 (1/63) – 6 (11/63)	6
	295

1964

Army Attack 1 (7/64) – 3 (12/64)	3
Army War Heroes 2 (2/64) – 6 (12/64)	5
Attack 3 (Fall 64)	1
Battlefield Action 51 (1/64) – 55 (11/64)	5
Billy the Kid 44 (2/64) – 47 (10/64)	4
Black Fury 46 (2/64) – 50 (12/64)	5
Blue Beetle 1 (6/64) – 3 (11/64)	3
Brides in Love 40 (2/64) 44 (12/64)	5
Career Girl Romances 24 (6/64) – 26 (11/64)	3
Cheyenne Kid 44 (2/64) – 48 (12/64)	5
Cynthia Doyle, Nurse in Love 74 (2/64)	1
D-Day 2 (Fall 64)	1
Fightin' Air Force 42 (1/64) – 46 (11/64)	5
Fightin' Army 56 (1/64) – 60 (11/64)	5
Fightin' Five, The 28 (7/64) – 30 (12/64)	3
Fightin' Marines 57 (2/64) 61 (12/64)	5
Fightin' Navy 114 (2/64) – 118 (12/64)	5
First Kiss 36 (2/64) – 39 (10/64)	4
Freddy 44 (2/64) – 46 (12/64)	3
Gorgo 17 (2/64) – 21 (12/64)	5
Gunmaster 1 (9/64) – 2 (11/64)	2
Hot Rod Racers 1 (12/64)	1
Hot Rods and Racing Cars 67 (1/64) – 71 (11/64)	5
I Love You 50 (2/64) – 54 (12/64)	5
Jungle Tales of Tarzan 1 (12/64)	1
Just Married 35 (2/64) – 39 (12/64)	5
Kid Montana 44 (1/64) – 48 (11/64)	5
Konga 16 (1/64) – 20 (12/64)	5
Konga's Revenge 3 (Fall 64)	1
Li'l Genius 48 (1/64) – 51 (11/64)	4
Love Diary 31 (1/64) – 35 (11/64)	5
Marines Attack 1 (8/64) – 2 (11/64)	2
Marine War Heroes 1 (1/64) – 5 (11/64)	5
My Little Margie 51 (1/64) – 54 (11/64)	4
Mysteries of Unexplored Worlds 40 (2/64) 44 (12/64)	5
Navy War Heroes 1 (1/64) – 5 (11/64)	5
Nurse Betsy Crane 26 (1/64) – 27 (3/64)	2
Outlaws of the West 47 (2/64) – 51 (12/64)	5
Return of Gorgo, The 3 (Fall 64)	1
Romantic Secrets 48 (1/64) 52 (11/64)	5
Romantic Story 70 (1/64) – 74 (11/64)	5
Sarge Steel 1 (12/64)	1
Secrets of Young Brides 41 (2/64) 44 (10/64)	4
Six-Gun Heroes 78 (1/64) – 81 (11/64)	4
Space Adventures 55 (1/64) – 59 (11/64)	5
Space War 26 (1/64) 27 (3/64)	2
Strange Suspense Stories 69 (2/64) – 72 (10/64)	4
Submarine Attack 43 (1/64) – 47 (11/64)	5
Sweethearts 75 (1/64) – 79 (11/64)	5
Teen-Age Confidential Confessions 22 (2/64)	1
Teenage Hotrodders 6 (2/64) 10 (12/64)	5
Teen-Age Love 36 (2/64) – 39 (10/64)	4
Teen Confessions 27 (2/64) – 31 (12/64)	5
Texas Rangers in Action 43 (1/64) - 47 (11/64)	5
Three Nurses 22 (3/64) – 23 (3/64)	2
Timmy, the Timid Ghost 42 (1/64) – 44 (10/64)	3
Unusual Tales 43 (1/64) – 47 (11/64)	5
U.S. Air Force Comics 31 (1/64) – 35 (11/64)	5
U.S. Marines 1 (Fall 64)	1
War and Attack 1 (Fall 64)	1
War Heroes 7 (2/64) – 11 (12/64)	5
Wyatt Earp, Frontier Marshall 52 (2/64) – 55 (10/64)	4
	230



Space War #22, May 1963



Li'l Genius #47, Nov. 1963

U.S. Marines #1, Fall 1964

1965

Army Attack 4 (2/65) 1
Army Attack 38 (7/65) – 41 (12/65) 4
Army War Heroes 7 (2/65) – 11 (11/65) 5
Battlefield Action 56 (1/65) – 61 (12/65) 6
Billy the Kid 48 (1/65) – 53 (12/65) 6
Black Fury 51 (2/65) – 55 (11/65) 5
Blue Beetle 4 (1/65) – 5 (3-4/65), 50 (7/65) – 53 (12/65) 6
Brides in Love 45 (2/65) 1
Captain Atom 78 (12/65) 1
Career Girl Romances 27 (1/65) – 31 (11/65) 5
Cheyenne Kid 49 (2/65) – 53 (11/65) 5
Dragstrip Hotrodders 2 (1/65) – 7 (12/65) 6
Fightin' Air Force 47 (1/65) – 52 (12/65) 6
Fightin' Army 61 (1/65) – 66 (12/65) 6
Fightin' Five, The 31 (2/65) – 35 (11/65) 5
Fightin' Marines 62 (2/65) – 66 (11/65) 5
Fightin' Navy 119 (2/65) – 123 (11/65) 5
First Kiss 40 (1/65) 1
Freddy 47 (2/65) 1
Frontier Scout, Dan'l Boone 14 (3/65) 1
Gorgo 22 (2/65) – 23 (9/65) 2
Gunmaster 3 (1/65) – 4 (3-4/65), 84 (7/65) – 86 (11/65) 5
Hot Rod Racers 2 (2/65) – 6 (11/65) 5
Hot Rods and Racing Cars 72 (1/65) – 77 (12/65) 6
I Love You 55 (2/65) – 59 (11/65) 5
Jungle Tales of Tarzan 2 (2/65) – 4 (7/65) 3
Just Married 40 (2/65) – 44 (11/65) 5
Kid Montana 49 (1/65) – 50 (3/65) 2
Konga 21 (2/65) – 23 (11/65) 3
Li'l Genius 52 (1/65) – 53 (10/65) 2
Love Diary 36 (1/65) – 41 (12/65) 6
Marines Attack 3 (1/65) – 8 (12/65) 6
Marine War Heroes 6 (1/65) – 11 (12/65) 6
Mysteries of Unexplored Worlds 45 (2/65) – 48 (9/65) 4
Navy War Heroes 6 (1/65) – 7 (3-4/65) 2
Outlaws of the West 52 (2/65) – 56 (11/65) 5
Romantic Story 75 (1/65) – 80 (12/65) 6
Sarge Steel 2 (2/65) – 6 (11/65) 5
Six-Gun Heroes 82 (1/65) – 83 (3-4/65) 2
Son of Vulcan 49 (11/65) 1
Special War Series 1 (8/65) – 4 (11/65) 4
Strange Suspense Stories 73 (1/65) – 77 (10/65) 5
Submarine Attack 48 (1/65) – 53 (12/65) 6
Summer Love 46 (10/65) 1
Sweethearts 80 (1/65) – 85 (12/65) 6
Teenage Hotrodders 11 (2/65) – 15 (11/65) 5
Teen-Age Love 40 (1/65) – 45 (12/65) 6
Teen Confessions 32 (2/65) – 36 (11/65) 5
Texas Rangers in Action 48 (1/65) – 53 (12/65) 6
Unusual Tales 48 (1/65) – 49 (3-4/65) 2
U.S. Air Force Comics 36 (1/65) – 37 (3-4/65) 2
War Heroes 12 (2/65) – 16 (11/65) 5
Wyatt Earp, Frontier Marshall 56 (1/65) – 61 (12/65) 6

221

1966

Army Attack 42 (2-3/66) – 46 (12/66) 5
Army War Heroes 12 (1/66) – 17 (12/66) 6
Attack 3 (10/66) 1
Battlefield Action 62 (2-3/66) 1
Billy the Kid 54 (2-3/66) – 58 (11/66) 5
Black Fury 56 (1/66) – 57 (3-4/66) 2
Blue Beetle 54 (2-3/66) 1
Captain Atom 79 (2-3/66) – 83 (11/66) 5
Career Girl Romances 32 (1/66) – 37 (12/66) 6
Cheyenne Kid 54 (1/66) – 59 (12/66) 6
D-Day 4 (9/66) 1
Dragstrip Hotrodders 8 (2-3/66) – 12 (11/66) 5
Fantastic Giants 24 (9/66) 1
Fightin' Air Force 53 (2-3/66) 1
Fightin' Army 67 (2-3/66) – 71 (11/66) 5
Fightin' Five, The 36 (1/66) – 40 (11/66) 5
Fightin' Marines 67 (1/66) – 72 (12/66) 6
Fightin' Navy 124 (1/66) – 125 (4-5/66) 2
Ghostly Tales 55 (4-5/66) – 58 (11/66) 4
Go-Go 1 (6/66) – 4 (12/66) 4
Gunfighters, The 51 (10/66) 1
Gunmaster 87 (1/66) – 88 (3-4/66) 2
Hollywood Romances 46 (11/66) 1
Hot Rod Racers 7 (1/66) – 11 (11/66) 5
Hot Rods and Racing Cars 78 (2-3/66) – 82 (12/66) 5
I Love You 60 (1/66) – 65 (12/66) 6
Judomaster 89 (5-6/66) – 92 (12/66) 4
Just Married 45 (1/66) – 50 (12/66) 6
Love Diary 42 (2-3/66) – 46 (11/66) 5
Marines Attack 9 (2-3/66) 1
Marine War Heroes 12 (2-3/66) – 16 (11/66) 5
Outlaws of the West 57 (1/66) – 61 (11/66) 5
Romantic Story 81 (2-3/66) – 85 (11/66) 5
Sarge Steel 7 (1/66) – 8 (3-4/66) 2
Secret Agent 9 (10/66) 1
Shadows from Beyond 50 (10/66) 1
Son of Vulcan 50 (1/66) 1
Submarine Attack 54 (2-3/66) 1
Summer Fun 54 (10/66) 1
Summer Love 47 (10/66) 1
Sweethearts 86 (2-3/66) – 90 (12/66) 5
Teenage Hotrodders 16 (1/66) – 21 (12/66) 6
Teen-Age Love 46 (2-3/66) – 50 (11/66) 5
Teen Confessions 37 (1/66) – 41 (11/66) 5
Texas Rangers in Action 54 (2-3/66) – 58 (12/66) 5
Thunderbolt 1 (1/66), 51 (3-4/66) – 55 (12/66) 6
Time for Love 53 (10/66) 1
Timmy, the Timid Ghost 45 (9/66) 1
War and Attack 54 (6/66) – 57 (12/66) 4
War Heroes 17 (1/66) – 21 (11/66) 5
Wild West 58 (11/66) 1
Wyatt Earp, Frontier Marshall 62 (2-3/66) – 66 (11/66) 5

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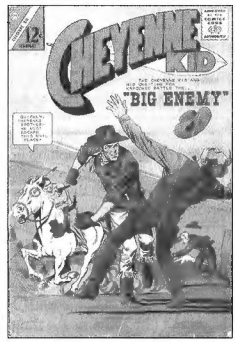
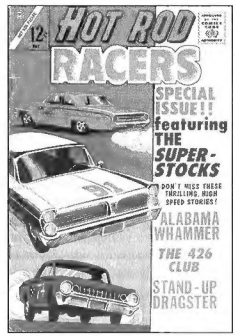
The **year-by-year checklist** of Charlton comics is provided through the courtesy of **Dan Stevenson,** who has personally seen 99.8% of the books. **Mike Tiefenbacher** was also a major source of the data. In future issues we will continue the series and compile expanded versions of this checklist, including prior/subsequent title and refined month/year data as this information becomes organized. The ultimate goal is a complete index of all Charlton comic books. Your input is not only desirable but essential! Please send any comments and corrections care of this magazine. In the meantime, remember:

Charlton Comics Give You More!



Cheyenne Kid #49, Feb. 1965



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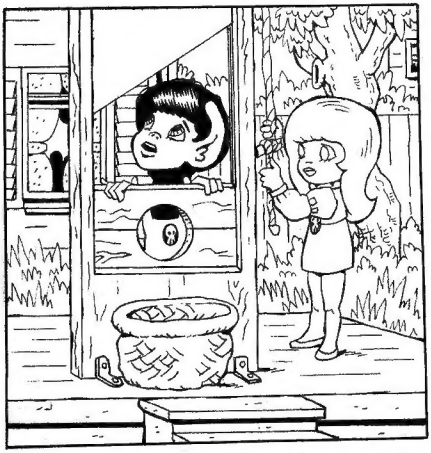

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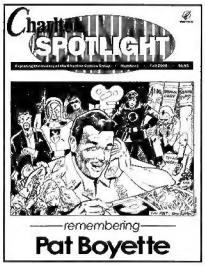

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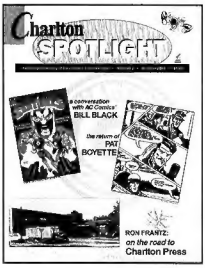
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